



When Grandma Danced in the Rain

by Trude Teige

*Trude Teige's novel **When Grandma Danced in the Rain** is a powerful, multigenerational story exploring family secrets, identity, love, and the deep scars left by war.*

At its core, the novel follows three generations of women—Tekla, her daughter Lilla, and her granddaughter Juni—as they each navigate their personal and historical traumas, ultimately converging on a journey of discovery and healing.

Juni's Story (The Granddaughter)

The story begins with Juni, the granddaughter, who returns to a small island in Norway to reflect on her life after inheriting her mother Lilla's house by the sea. Juni, facing her own personal struggles to get out of a toxic relationship and contemplating ending an unwanted pregnancy, embarks on a journey to uncover the secrets of her mother and grandmother. As she revisits her childhood home and recalls her family's history, she begins to piece together the hidden truths that shaped their lives. As she explores her family's past, Juni discovers letters, photographs, and remnants of a hidden history. She learns about Tekla's love for Otto, the persecution she faced, and the deep scars left by war and betrayal. Through this journey, Juni begins to understand the sacrifices made by the women before her and the emotional burdens they carried.

Her investigation takes her beyond Norway, leading her to Germany, where she searches for traces of her grandfather and the life her grandmother once had. In doing so, she confronts her own fears and insecurities, ultimately finding a sense of closure and a newfound understanding of her own identity.

Tekla's Story (The Grandmother)

Tekla, Juni's grandmother, is a young woman during the German occupation of Norway. She falls in love with Otto, a German soldier, despite the intense social stigma surrounding relationships between Norwegian women and German soldiers. After the war, such women are labeled as "Tyskertøser" (German girls) and are subjected to severe mistreatment, including public shaming, forced head-shaving, and internment in camps. Tekla's family reacts harshly to her relationship with Otto. Her father and brother are outraged, viewing her actions as a betrayal of Norway. Tekla, determined to stay with Otto, decides to leave Norway and travel to Germany with him.

In Germany, Otto and Tekla face a series of harrowing experiences that reflect both the physical devastation of the war and the emotional toll it takes on their relationship and hopes for the future. After the war, Otto and Tekla are sent to Germany, initially landing in Kiel and later moving to Hamburg. There, they are placed in a transit camp, a harsh environment where returning German soldiers and their foreign wives lived in extremely poor conditions. Eventually, they arrive in Demmin, Otto's hometown. There, Otto discovers that his mother and sister died on May 1, 1945, likely during or immediately after the Red Army's occupation—a reference to the mass suicides and rapes in Demmin at the time. When they reach his family's home, Otto finds his father gravely ill and is deeply emotional upon reuniting with the "Mamsell," a kind woman who welcomes Tekla as family despite having little food to share.

Thekla soon realizes that life in post-war Germany is far from what she has imagined. The country is in ruins, and her presence as a foreign woman associated with a German soldier makes her an outsider. The war has left the country devastated, and resources are scarce. Otto tries to provide for them, but the realities of post-war Germany put a strain on their relationship. Her time in Germany is marked by hardship, violence and the traumatizing loss of Otto and Thekla being raped by Russian soldiers (a fate many women around her in Germany have suffered, too). These experiences leave deep psychological scars and contribute to her emotional distance in later years. Following Otto's death, Tekla finds shelter with strangers and eventually reconnects with her friend Sonja in Hanover. She's pregnant and emotionally broken, but Sonja provides comfort. Tekla expresses a strong desire to return to Norway but she will need to give birth to the baby in Germany. In the months afterwards, she is desperately to find a Norwegian ship to take her home. One day, she meets Norwegian sailor Konrad who is also deeply traumatized. The second volume in the trilogy, *WHEN GRANDPA BREATHED WITH THE WAVES* will tell his story. Konrad takes pity of the malnourished mother and her baby and prepares to smuggle both back to Norway, finally succeeding. Upon return to Norway, Thekla never tells her family everything that happened to her and lives with those scars silently for decades, deeply bonding with Konrad over those heavy memories of the war both share. The foundation of an extraordinary love and marriage.

Lilla's Story (The Mother)

Lilla, Tekla's daughter, grows up on a small Norwegian island with her parents but maintains a strained, mysterious relationship with Tekla. She lives an unconventional life, marked by silence, unspoken pain, and secrets. She never reveals to her daughter Juni the identity of Juni's father. Her death marks the beginning of the novel's central quest, as she bequeaths the island house to Juni, unknowingly setting off the next chapter in the family's story. Lilla grew up on the small island, but her relationship with Tekla was always strained. She sensed that her mother was hiding something and resented the lack of openness. Tekla, in turn, struggled with guilt and the burden of the past. Lilla led an unconventional life and never revealed to her own daughter, Juni, who her father was.

As an adult, Lilla worked in the city and only visited the island on weekends. She pursued her own life, never fully understanding her mother's choices or the sacrifices she had made. She remained distant from Juni as well, creating a cycle of secrecy and unanswered questions that would later affect Juni's own sense of identity.

Conclusion

The novel deals with themes of inherited trauma, the effects of war on women, societal judgment, silence and shame, and ultimately, reconciliation and forgiveness. It confronts Norway's little-discussed treatment of women who were involved with German soldiers and reflects on how personal choices in history ripple across generations.

When Grandma Danced in the Rain is both intimate and historically poignant. Through Juni's eyes, the story brings long-buried truths into the light, revealing how love, pain, and the need for understanding persist across generations. The title itself becomes symbolic—referring to Tekla's small acts of joy amidst great sorrow, and the hope that future generations might finally be free of the burdens of the past.

Teige masterfully intertwines historical events with personal narratives, showing how the past continues to shape the present. Through Tekla, Lilla, and Juni, the novel illustrates how secrets and unspoken truths can affect generations and how confronting history can lead to healing.

Through Juni's journey, readers experience the importance of understanding the past and the power of truth in shaping one's future. The novel serves as a reminder that history is not just about nations and wars but also about individual lives, choices, and the enduring impact of love and sacrifice.

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