

The Stars Still Shine

“Es wird in Ordnung sein, dass die Sterne leuchten noch in der Nacht” I now sang to myself. I never thought I’d feel so alone.

I guess I thought my brother was immortal, because I was shocked when he got sick. *Pnumonia*, the doctor had said, *a common illness*. Perhaps for myself, and eighty percent of the population, but not for Angus. Angus was born with severe cerebral palsy, and spent his life depending on others. Depending on *me*. Taking Angus to **doctors’** appointments, making sure he ate his vegetables, and paying for his every need was my job, as our mother died in childbirth and our father left once he found out about Angus’ condition. We grew up with our grandmother, but she was far too old to care for Angus. She knew how hard it was for me to take care of Angus, and I remember how she used to sing to me every night when I would cry. Our grandmother always sang old lullabies in German, from her homeland. *“Es wird in Ordnung sein, dass die Sterne leuchten noch in der Nacht.”* *It will be **all right**, the stars still shine at night.*

October 10, 2004

As I sat in an uncomfortable lawn chair in the cemetery only a month later, I couldn’t believe it happened so quickly. *I closed my eyes and recalled each treatment, the sleepless nights full of coughing, the sirens of the ambulance, the deafening squeal of a flat-lining heart monitor, and I opened them to reveal a tall pastor from a church I didn’t attend, reading from a book I didn’t believe in.* There were only the two of us there.

That evening I went back to my first-story apartment and looked at the handicapped entrance. I’d walked up that ramp a thousand times, pushing the weight of a metal wheelchair and my **hundred-pound** brother. But somehow, as I trudged up the short incline now, each step

was the weight of a crashing wave. I was no longer strong enough to push back. I was going to drown. Stepping inside that empty apartment got harder with each passing day, passing school pictures and the empty wheelchair where the joy of my life used to sit. The mail was in a pile on the kitchen table, past due stamps obstructing the porcelain envelope. I hadn't been to work in two weeks. I closed my eyes.

*After Angus was diagnosed, I sang to him on those nights when he **coughed**. I'd sit on the edge of his bed and pat his leg, singing that calming German phrase that always seemed to ease the coughing. Then I'd shut the door and go to bed.*

My eyelashes fluttered open and my gaze shifted to Angus' door. I shut it, even though I knew I wouldn't sleep any that night. I went to the small bathroom down the hall and splashed my face with cold water. Raising my head to the mirror, I saw the resemblance. We had the same green eyes, flecks of gold swimming around. We had the same unruly, black curls that hung too far into my eyes. We had the same smile, one end tugging higher than the other. I couldn't tell if it was tap water running down my cheeks or tears.

October 17, 2004

I'd spent every birthday with Angus since I was six, but when I woke, I realized that I was turning twenty eight and there was no one left to celebrate with. There would be no card fashioned out of a coloring sheet, rebellious colors avoiding black boundaries on the page. There would be no sloppy signature at the bottom. There would be no Angus.

Combing my scattered curls, I looked again into the mirror. God, it was hard to look at my own reflection when all I saw was someone with no life of his own. I'd devoted my life to Angus, and I didn't know what I was going to do now. I walked into my room and looked to the

corner at the telescope I'd received as a gift from my grandmother when I was eight. I loved looking at the stars, because they were full of wonder and mystery; I hadn't stargazed in years.

My twenty-eighth birthday was **uneventful**. I watched television and stared at Angus' obituary in the paper. "Angus Parker was a special child who was protected by God," it had read. *If God was protecting him, why would he take him from me?* I thought to myself. *Where was God when he got sick?* But there was the soft, nagging voice of my grandmother in the back of my head, assuring me that my life was in God's plan, that there was absolutely nothing I could do to stop it. I glanced over to the 'good book' on my counter and felt a small tinge of hope. Picking it up, I flipped through the delicate pages to John. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." *Maybe it would be easier if I let God deal with this pain.* And so I fell to my knees. I gasped for air. I was back to the surface. The water retracted. I was safe.

October 28, 2004

As I laid in my bed I considered how my life changed in only a few weeks. I'd gone to church for the first time, I'd sold the wheelchair. Things were getting better, and the weight of the world no longer rested on my shoulders. I rose and **walked** to the corner, retrieving the dusty telescope. Pointed out the window, I lowered my sight to the lens. I had forgotten how beautiful the sky was, and I felt my eyes gloss over with tears at their majesty, their wonder. I knew I wasn't alone anymore.

I closed my eyes. "Es wird in Ordnung sein, dass die Sterne leuchten noch in der Nacht."