

REVIVING GRANDMA

One spring morning, as a gleaming gloriole-gold medallion showered the world with warmth and joy, innocent and cheery laughs reverberated through the atmosphere. A 15-year-old autistic boy sat by the window, brows furrowed and hand clenched, nonchalant of nature. His table was laid tidily with a solved 6 by 6 Rubik's Cube, a finished sudoku book and papers; papers on a 3-dimensional display, wavefront computation and optics. Albeit, it would be unjust to downright attribute his inattentiveness and unperturbedness towards nature to his condition when it was a consequence of relentlessly blankly gazing at his amazon order tracker. Astoundingly though, with a single glance at the frame on his desk, he harked back to the 16th of January.

It was another ordinary day at school when Arun's mother came to pick him up during a class. On the way, she feverously told him that his grandma had suffered a heart attack and there was a minimal chance of her survival. Arun recalled feeling vacuous initially. His grandma was dying? The lady who taught him to speak; the one who stayed with him at night and read stories to him; the only one, who not even for a second looked down at him for being autistic. She was leaving him, her 'gleaming star'? Was it possible? Fortunately, Arun had reached in time to see his grandma putting on that all too familiar re-assuring smile and murmuring gently, "I love and believe in you, my star. You should too." Then breathing her last.

A ringing sound roused him, but he still felt dazed. The flashbacks were getting worse. Not only did they happen more frequently, but he had also begun reliving the surge of immeasurable panic and fear he had felt then. Arun quickly composed himself as he heard his grandpa's footsteps. Seconds later, his grandpa walked into his room and handed over the amazon package to Arun. Arun had almost forgotten about it. As he carefully unwrapped it, a sense of purpose and determination was born; and a smidgen of hope too.

Time passed; Arun ate less and slept lesser. His eyes were sunken and his cheeks were hollow. One Sunday, as Arun secretly lay awake, upgrading his device, his stomach growled. The aroma of baked cheesy garlic pasta and chocolate caramel ice cream, coming from the living room where his parents were chatting with their guest, was quite tempting. When his stomach growled the second time, Arun gave up. He proceeded towards the living room and pointed towards the table.

"Snacks!", he exclaimed.

"Arun, what are you doing here? Go back to bed." advised his mother, Nisha.

"Snacks!", repeated Arun, with greater insistence.

"No Arun. You must not eat this late at night. Father, please take Arun back to his room.", requested Arun's father, Sachin.

Unfortunately, Arun was feeling ravenous after nibbling on food for a week. He was not going to be hindered. Only after Arun's grandpa took Arun back to his room and showed Arun his grandma's picture did Arun calm down.

"Sorry. I don't understand what's happening. Arun was improving, but since my mom died, his condition is worsening.", said Sachin anxiously to his guest, Shailesh.

"Arun was always close to your mom. Don't be too hard on him.", advised Shailesh.

Sachin murmured in agreement but still looked distressed.

“What happened? Is there anything else?” enquired Shailesh.

“Nothing. Uh, father, I think you should go to Arun’s room. See if he is all right.” said Sachin abruptly.

After his father had left Sachin said, “I didn’t want to tell you in front of my father. He would take unnecessary stress.”

After taking a deep breath, Sachin began, “I have been seeing my mom for almost a week now. She isn’t translucent though. I see her as clearly as I see you now. It is always after midnight. Just yesterday I was shutting down my laptop when I saw her walk past the living room. By the time Nisha woke up, my mother had disappeared.”, said Sachin gravely.

Nisha shook her head and outright dismissed the idea. “Ghosts aren’t real. It’s definitely depression... or probably hallucination.”

Just then, Shailesh caught sight of a pair of fair-skin wrinkled feet under the curtains. Stunned, he quickly composed himself.

“If you see her again, give me a call. I’ll come.”, suggested Shailesh. Holding the door handle Shailesh added, “I don’t think you need a psychiatrist though.”, before leaving.

That very same night, as Sachin lay awake, at around 2 am, he saw his mother clad in white cloth walk past the living room before vanishing. The next morning Sachin called Shailesh and asked him to come over. At 6 pm, Shailesh, Sachin and Nisha sat in the living room to go over the plan.

“So here’s my plan. Nisha, you will have to sleep in the spare room today. Sachin and I will be in the master bedroom, awake the entire night. I have brought a camera with me. If she is a ghost, my camera will not capture her image. However, if my camera does capture her image, we’ll think about that later. Right now, if I may, I want to examine your house, see if an outsider can get in somehow.”, asked Shailesh.

“Sure, we have no problem.”, said Sachin.

A close examination proved what Shailesh had suspected since the beginning. There was no way an outsider could get in, so it was the work of an insider. Probably Sachin’s father, though Shailesh couldn’t think of any motive. Night time came, and time passed. Shailesh could barely keep his eyes open. A sweet-sickly feminine perfume smell first disturbed his sleep.

Then it happened.

A clicking sound came and the 3 of them woke up immediately. There, visible from the spare room and master bedroom, the 3 of them saw an ash-white skin-coloured graceful lady, with chocolate eyes and rosy lips in the living room. Within a second she had vanished. Frozen to their spots, Shailesh was the first to recover. He hurriedly walked around the house and was perplexed to find Sachin’s father asleep. Then who was it, and why was Sachin’s father eavesdropping the other day. Shailesh realised he was being impatient. Maybe he was making a fuss out of something that would be easily explainable. No, he had to be logical and rational. As he racked his brains, the scent came again. A feminine perfume? In the middle of the night?

“Are you two able to detect a scent?” asked Shailesh.

“Yes. I recognise this scent. It’s the perfume my mother used to use.”, replied Sachin.

“This is Chanel’s Coco Mademoiselle.”, added Nisha.

Taken aback by this revelation, the pieces slowly fit together and Shailesh was amazed by the brilliance of the plan, the truth. Now, he only needed to collect evidence.

The next morning, when Arun was at school, Shailesh inspected Arun’s room. He found what he needed. An invoice and a perfume. When Arun returned, Shailesh pulled him aside and asked him.

“Dear, do you miss your grandma?” asked Shailesh gently.

After a pause, Arun nodded in agreement.

“What do you miss the most about her?” asked Shailesh.

Casting Shailesh a cautious glance, Arun said, “smell.”

Shailesh exhaled a sigh of relief, he was right. In the evening, everyone sat in the living room, eagerly waiting to listen to Shailesh.

“Do you know what made me dismiss the idea of hallucinations Sachin? A pair of feet... under the curtains.” stated Shailesh, glancing at Sachin’s father.

“Well... my son has never hidden a thing from me. Naturally, I was curious and concerned.”, admitted Sachin’s father, a bit defensively.

“Oh, well. That is understandable. Now, yesterday, when she appeared, I detected a strong fragrance, coming from Arun’s room.” said Shailesh and paused to see the dramatic reaction. As he had guessed everyone shot Shailesh a bewildered look.

“Yes, our very own Arun.”, confirmed Shailesh.

He then took out an invoice and perfume bottle and kept them on the table.

“I want you to look at this invoice carefully. It is an Amazon invoice of a hologram projector. Whenever Arun yearned for his grandmother, he would switch on this device and spray the perfume, thereby, recreating, or as Arun wanted, reviving his grandma. Arun would try to delude himself into believing that she is still beside him as it gave him relief from the surmounting emotional pain he has been enduring.”, revealed Shailesh.

Shailesh waited for this to sink in and began again.

“You see, your mother’s death had devastated Arun. She was the only one who spent time with Arun, tried to understand him and showered him with love. Most importantly, Arun knew that. Am I right Arun?” asked Shailesh.

Arun slowly nodded his head, staring at the floor.

“My advice, this hidden genius and potential in Arun needs to be nurtured. You don’t need to bring the moon to help him, give him your affection and time and it will take him a long way.”, suggested Shailesh.

Rightfully so. It is care and attention that helps us ‘find the strength to persevere and endure despite overwhelming obstacles.’