

**Life in Covid-19**  
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It was a normal morning in the Lunge household : Children were in from the city for their summer vacations in the idyllic countryside, nevertheless well developed, with grandma indulged in some grim conversation with her son and daughter-in-law, and grandpa lying listlessly on the bed after another bout of asthma attack just days ago. Ivan, after vociferously devouring every storybook doled out to him was getting restless out of boredom, and all his toys too no longer gave him any joy. Lunch was to be served two hours from now, and his parents had shooed him away thrice when he had tried to interrupt them. Getting bored as hell, with nothing to do, he then went to pester his grandpa, who now no longer even tried to protest when he would suddenly lunge out of nowhere on his chest, sending him wheezing into his bouts of racking coughs. He would just give a faint smile and ask what the matter was. The demand was the Ivane : he had to be engaged somehow for some hours with some random story. The fairies and their kingdoms having been exhausted, the grandpa thus began to tell a rather dystopian story from his childhood :

“This is a story from the times when I was just an adolescent. The world had suddenly been brought onto its knees by a deadly virus which couldn’t be stopped by nobody. Schools, workplaces and public spaces had been sealed off for months, albeit opening some of them intermittently, though nobody actually went out during those brief opening pulses, thus making no difference all the Ivane. I was getting mad out of boredom, stuck in my house for months and was itching to go out. Consequently, one fine morning, taking all the necessary precautions though, I went out with my friends for trekking at the local hillside. It was a lovely experience : Climbing up those deserted looking hills with just my friends, slightly lowering our masks to let in gallons of fresh air, Oh! Those were my carefree days! Not being able to resist the temptation, I subsequently cheated my parents a few more times to sneak out for a few hours in the morning when they were busiest and wouldn’t check.

What happened next was not so unexpected then, but nevertheless you still feel the chills, literally, when the devil actually knocks on your door, no matter how many times you may have heard about his prophetic arrivals. I went down with that damned virus. Initially though, me and my parents were not that petrified : The virus was supposed to go easy on us teens. Indeed, a few other of my parents who were down too, were ‘asymptomatic’, meaning they felt almost no hindrance to going on with their lives apart from being artificially notified of the fact that they were supposed to be ill. My case

was different though : After a few days of mild weakness, my condition steadily deteriorated. First came the intensification of the pre-existing symptoms, with the mild ache slowly becoming debilitating, and loss of smell, taste and appetite accompanying the ache soon after. Things started to get out of hand when one day I started reeling due to the plummeting levels of oxygen in my body, with my levels just being an alarming 60% of what they should have been. I was immediately rushed to the hospital and admitted into the intensive care unit alongside other geriatrics. Things yet did not improve, and mortality levels in the other beds too were soaring.

Then came the moment of reckoning : Undoubtedly the situation being bad, my chances of passing away were slim. But getting better through the normal route via the ad-hoc mixture of vitamins and other immunity boosters would take time, and also potentially leave me with a weaker pair of lungs than before. The doctors further warned that the wretched virus could potentially mess around with my glucose levels, leaving me pre-disposed to diabetes in my later life. The other choice on my platter was that I could sign up for the trials of the newly emerging vaccine, and apparently candidates like me were especially desired for I belonged to the rare community of young-yet-severely-affected-by-the-virus. The promised future was all rosy : Serious side effects were not yet known, and diabetes and all the other shit could also be avoided.

My parents dilly-dallied for a while, but finally my falling parameters forced their hand : They consented to my candidature for the vaccine trials. Things improved soon after the vaccine shots, though I sometimes wonder how much time it would have taken even otherwise.”

Grandpa stopped. His eyes seemed distant and wet. One had the strange feeling as though he was drowning in his own tears. Ivan became a bit wary. He thought of leaving, and was about to do so, but a slight tug behind the back of his collar told him to stay. An awkward silence filled the room.

“Then?” , asked Ivan.

“Then what. Years passed by. I sometimes had the feeling that my lungs wouldn’t prop me up the way they did before, but nothing much. Then someday, thirty years later, the reeling sensation returned. I was in the midst of a presentation when suddenly my head started swimming. I lost sense of direction and had a severe hot flash. Started sweating like pigs and blacked out.

Tests would initially not reveal anything, until a MRI revealed cancer of the lungs. Then followed the state of being half dead and half alive. The job went. Became bald. Chemotherapy ate it all up. Week after week of sessions, physiotherapists,.... Some intrepid journalist by that time pieced together what happened : The Russian vaccine, the one I had been given a shot of, had been inadequately tested for its long term impact. In the rush of scoring a Sputnik moment, it had become Russia’s Chernobyl one. The vaccine was revealed to eat up the telomeres of the chromosomes containing our genes, increasing the chances of having cancer manifold. An entire population

inoculated with the serum of death. The thalidomide and minamata moment of our generation. My lungs are slowly asphyxiating itself with a mass of dense tissue.”

Ivan was shell shocked.

“So now?”

“So now I shall take my leave.”

--- Arpon Basu

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**\*\*Disclaimer:-** I don't claim veracity of any scientific fact I may have presented/suggested here, and neither do I intend to spread misinformation about the vaccine trials currently going on.