

Dewdrops on Leaves

“Ma, guess what I have brought from the garden...!”

“Hmm, a butterfly maybe?”

“Wrong, take another try!”

“Sweetheart, this is not the time for me to play! I must get ready for college, right? So, why don’t u tell me what u brought, ok?”

“You won’t believe it! I brought diamonds!”

And out came a leaf - carefully caressed in the folded palms of a little boy, as if holding the most precious item in the world. The leaf had a few dewdrops on it. He raised the leaf to face the morning rays coming through the window. The droplets glittered like diamond!

“One day, I will buy you diamonds just like these!”

His chest swollen with optimistic pride; the little boy’s shining eyes rose just in time to catch a glimpse of his mother’s eyes. She turned swiftly to not let him see her tears. The boy believed that whatever may come his way, he would always have his mother by his side, and they could defeat everyone! She did not want her tears to cause any crack in the belief.

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“AARGHHH! Shit, my leg!”

“That must have hurt pretty bad!”, “Watch your way, man!” – Flying comments and the pain from tripping over the stone brought me to my senses. Thirty years have passed since that event. Today, the light through the dew drops does not make them diamonds. And yet, after so many years, so long away from home, the dream felt like meeting a long-lost lover.

“It must have been the dewdrops I noticed in the morning today on my rose plant”, I tried to reassure my fuzzy brain. It was an especially chilly morning for a Mumbai winter. In the five years I have spent working in the city, if it has taught me anything it is that you cannot afford getting muddled in memories. I promised myself to not let the thought wander in my mind anymore.

My mother had stayed back. She could never get over the idea of living her home. Our interactions are now limited to my annual visits during Durga Puja and the occasional phone calls. Both of us have gotten used to our paces. That is the funny thing about humans – we learn to adapt.

I spent an hour in the office trying to rummage through files, clicking aimlessly on my desktop but the incident of the morning was haunting me like a ghost. It was getting

impossible to focus and I knew the best solution. I headed over to the coffee machine and helped myself to a strong dose of caffeine.

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“I am tired of this sum! I have been at it over the last hour, but it shows no sign of being solved!”

“Maybe you are not trying hard enough. You are tired. Go, get some sleep!”

“I can’t sleep now. Who will complete the assignments?”

“Then let me get you some coffee!”

And, without waiting for a minute, she headed to the kitchen, and in five minutes came out with two cups of steaming coffee.

“You will drink too? Now, at 1 in the night? You go to sleep!”

“Actually, I have to read today’s newspaper. I have not read it yet. And, oh! The crossword too! You continue with your problem.”

She assured me while running her fingers through my hair slowly. I noticed the newspaper lay untouched; the daily crossword already filled hours ago. The white and black boxes winked back at me. In five minutes, my maths problem was cracked as well.

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“Hey Satish, what’s wrong with you dude? Your coffee is overflowing!” The sudden jerk from Ashutosh, my colleague, brought me into reality. I was not sure how long I had been pressing the coffee drip button.

“You look lost! Is everything all right?”

“Yeah! Its fine”, I shrugged him off. But inside I felt a strange sense of unease. I spoke with my boss and took an early leave for the day. “Better get some rest and start afresh tomorrow.”, I reassured myself.

After reaching home, I decided to take a shower and cleanse my mind.

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“*Shona!* What’s taking you so long in the shower?”

“Nothing ma, I’m fine. Coming out in five minutes.”

But nothing was all right.

“Almost six months since graduation day, eighty walk-ins and still no job! Sunaina’s parents have already started the search for a suitor.” I looked at the hazy mirror and could only see getting myself engulfed by a cloud of uncertainty and despair.

I did not need my mother's constant nagging to add to my worries. So, I came out of the shower and headed straight for the dining table. I rushed through my dinner but could feel the silent stare of my mother piercing through my stonewall of silence.

"Eat slowly, or you might choke."

I avoided any conversation, choosing to focus my rage on the harmless piece of chapati instead.

"You can tell me, son."

I maintained my silence. I felt like blurting out, but I was not the little kid who needed her mother's support at every fall. "This is my battle!", I screamed inside.

"Has she broken up with you?"

"W...Who?" I choked as the chapati managed to get its revenge.

"How will I know her name? You have never told me."

Tears that had long been held back flooded through my eyes. I sobbed in her arms, as she held me tightly. My heart shed kilos of weight with every worry I shared with her.

Next day, my mother went to see Sunaina's parents. It took a little persuasion, but they nodded their consent. The next week, I got a call from a trading firm in Mumbai. Lady luck seemed to have smiled on me at last. My mother gave me back my life.

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"*Shona!* What's taking you so long in the shower?" Sunaina's voice hit me like a burst of cold water. "You have been inside for an hour."

I came out and pondered whether to share my predicament with my wife and finally decided in the affirmative.

"Give her a call. You must be missing her", her advice sounded exceedingly simple. I decided to call my mother later that night.

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As I was watering my rose plant in the evening, my mobile rang suddenly. It was from an unknown number.

"Hello!",

"Hello, Satish?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"Your uncle here. *Beta Satish*, I have to tell you something. Your Mother is no more! She suffered a massive heart attack in the afternoon..." His voice seemed to trail off as my mind started sinking into an abyss. My eyes were fixed on the leaves of the rose plant. The dewdrops were nowhere to be seen.