

ONE RAINY DAY

- JASVINDER KAUR

It was my seventeenth birthday and I was sick with fever. I kept itching myself anxiously as I waited to hear from my crush Elijah. I could not stop gawking at his photos as I infuriatingly waited for his wishes. I was scratching everywhere; it felt like the itch was in my veins and not in my skin.

‘Happy birthday my precious!’ My grandmother wished me with a kiss.

‘Thanks, Nana! I love you so much’ I replied.

My friends surprised me by sending over a bouquet and a cake at twelve am. I tried to celebrate my day for my family and friends, but I felt lost and miserable inside. I kept telling myself that it is my infection and fever that made me feel this way but something did not feel alright. I felt suffocated by seeing everyone near me. I blew the candles and made a wish and called it a night. I was pleased to finally hear from Elijah. He was the only one to who did not think of as a weird girl. I felt grateful that he was a part of my life and he

understood that I believed in the healing power of nature, which was passed on to me by my grandmother.

I woke up the next day to my father crying loudly in his room; I rushed to see him and found out the gut-wrenching news my grandmother had passed away. I fainted after hearing the news.

‘Wake up Michelle! Wake up! Her skin has gotten red and swollen. Richard! Let’s take her to the hospital’ my mother yelled.

I lied down on the ground shaking with my eyes closed as I heard the voices of my family around me. I was no longer the master of myself and it felt as if a peripheral force was entering into my body and someone was trying to control me like a puppet. I resisted the push, but the strength of my body could not fight it. My mouth went dry and a pungent smell surrounded my nose, I screamed and screamed, but not a soul heard me. Somehow, I took charge of my body, my soul overpowered the external force and I felt alive but I was constantly hearing voices. The strong smell of medicines and sanitisers hinted to me I was in the hospital but the voices I heard confused me.

‘Oh! Honey ... I waited so long for you. It is too late now’ a woman sighed.

‘Can you hear me? Susan?... I am with you! Please don’t leave me ... I am not ready,’ a man sobbed.

Who were these people I thought to myself, and why was I hearing their private conversations? I tried to open my eyes but my eyelids felt as heavy as a rock and suddenly, I lost control again. The itching was back and I painted my entire skin red by constantly rubbing it. I saw Nana running towards me and yelling my name and my eyes finally opened.

‘Michelle! Can you hear us? Her whole body is covered in a rash, Doctor! Is she going to be alright?’ my mother screamed.

‘I am fine!’

Someone whispered into my ears.

‘Tell them!’

The voice came again

‘I ... I ... I am fine mom and dad’ I said barely.

‘Are you sure honey? You fainted’ my mother sighed.

It was just your fever, you are weak.

I heard the voice again.

‘Did you both say something? Something about me being weak?’ I asked.

‘No! We did not. Do you feel weak?’ she asked while rubbing my hand.

‘Ahhh ... yes maybe’ I said faintly.

‘Aww, honey! You got me worried. It is heartbreaking that your grandmother died today. Your father is in immense pain. He... we need to start with the formalities for her funeral. Your auntie May is coming to look after you’ she said with a lump in her throat.

‘Does this mean that I will never celebrate my birthday again mommy?’ I asked.

‘No... No! honey, your grandmother lived a happy life of 83 years. She had a natural death. We do not see that as pain but as a release of her suffering. God blessed her soul and now she is in the afterlife. It was her love for you that made it happen. You are the lucky one, my child’ my mother replied.

80.. I was 80.

The whisper came again.

‘Wasn’t she 80 mom?’ I asked.

‘80? 83! ... I believe she was 83, I will confirm with your father. For now, please don’t hold this in your heart sweetie, we will celebrate your day later. I have to take this call; it is auntie may’.

I was perplexed my entire ride home from the hospital. I kept thinking to myself whose voice do I kept hearing in my head? As I began to grieve the loss of my Nana, I felt dejected as her demise happened on my birthday. I cancelled my plans with Elijah and prepared myself for the funeral. It was hard for me to differentiate the pain of my sorrows, was it the loss of my beloved grandmother or the nerve wrecking fact that my birthday was ruined forever? I drank my emotions and scratched myself and went to the church with auntie May. I had never felt such an icy-cold breeze in summer before. I experienced goosebumps all over me and felt chills as I entered the church. I started crying as I stood in front of Nana’s dead body and double pinched myself to admit this reality. Her face looked peaceful as if she was serene and smiling. We bid our last goodbyes as we prayed for the repose of her soul. The feelings of claustrophobia came back again, and I struggled to hold sense of my body.

I will not die like this. Michelle ask them to put on Elvis’s song.

Someone whispered in my ear again.

I quickly looked at my back and no one was behind. I ran to my father and begged him to put on Nana's favourite song. I suddenly remembered how she always wanted a happy funeral instead of sad one. Everyone's faces lit up from the song and we all celebrated her glories. Auntie May drove home from the church as my fever worsened from the unexpected showers.

'Do you want to watch a movie together?' auntie May asked.

'No! I am just going to be in my room now' I replied.

I felt a sense of relief walking to my room, a feeling of safety.

'Nana? What are you doing in my room? I am so glad to see you!' I screamed.

'Do not yell Michelle! I am here in spirit and to guide you. You must complete a task for me. I want you to go in my room and find my letters for George. I should have posted it to him, I should not have waited this long. But! But ... I did not know I had so less time. You must do this Michelle for your Nana. I will never find peace without it' Nana sobbed.

'I am so confused Nana! Who is George? I cannot see spirits. This is not...'

'We don't have much time Michelle. Hurry up! Go to my room and in my second cabinet you will find ten letters addressed to George. They have his address on it. I want you to drive up there and give it to him in person. Michelle! He was my true love, I never got the courage to chase up my dream. Live it for me!'

'YOU OK KIDDO?', Auntie May shouted.

'Yeah! I was just doing some thinking' I sighed.

'I thought you were talking to someone? I heard voices' auntie May said weakly.

'Oh! Nothing but some birthday wishes from my friends. I am hungry, could you please get some food for me? I am like starving' I said.

After auntie May left, I rushed to Nana's room and found the letters. I found a young photo of them in her personal diary, I never realised that we looked so freakishly alike, the similarity was uncanny. I waited two days for my fever to get better, Nana's soul held on to me with my suffering. She told me stories of her and George while they were young. I had never known my Nana like that, my grandad was a navy officer and he was always away from her. She told me

her marriage was happy but her true love was George. They both left each other when she got pregnant with my father but she never forgot him. We both managed to track him down and decided to visit him. I showed her the picture I found, she cried seeing him.

‘How come you never mentioned him, Nana?’

‘A woman’s heart is a profound sea of secrets. Also, we both were married to someone else; it did not feel justified to talk about him. Promise me if you ever find your George you will not let him go. It took me my entire life to understand that love is not pain, love is happiness and when you find it you never let it go!’

The next day we drove to see George, I checked on the address and found that he was living in a nursing home. I had butterflies driving to his place, it felt as if I was meeting my lost ex-lover. I checked in at the reception and saw George sitting with his nurse outside, he was staring at the pool like it was a magnificent beach.

‘Hey, George! You probably don’t know me? But I am ...’

‘Agatha! Agatha! Is that really you? I saw you in my dream that day, I knew you would come to see me one day’ George cried.

‘I am Agatha’s grand-daughter George. Nana passed away a week ago. We found these letters in her cupboard. I thought I would come down and deliver it to you. I know she wanted you to have this’ I said.

‘Ahh...My sweet Agatha! Is she here with you? She told me she would haunt me if I did not say goodbye to her. I always have and always will love you, Agatha! AGATHA!!’ George yelled.

‘I am sorry! George suffers from dementia. He probably thought you were your grandmother. You should leave before he gets worse, the doctor will be here soon for his medication’ the nurse said.

‘Could you also give him this photo? It is him and my nana from their younger days!’ I gave the photo and left.

I was shaken by what had happened today, I wept all my way home. I felt nana's agony in my heart, I was overwhelmed by what had happened there. I witnessed the pain of losing a lover. I texted Elijah and expressed all my feelings for him as I did not want to hide my emotions any longer. I did not hear from Nana after the visit, I kept wondering if her spirit had left me or was it looking after George’s. My anxiety and the feelings of claustrophobia came back and I suffered to move. My mouth went dry again, I lost control over my

body and an external force surrounded my existence, I choked and a dark pungent smell covered my face again. My brain signaled my nerves to move but I laid still on the ground, struggling to move as if I was possessed.

'Thank you for everything you did for me, Michelle. I am finally at peace. Eat the herbs from the garden, they will help you in building strength and recovery'
Nana said as she caressed my cheek.

'Alright nana, I will.'

I woke up the next day in my room all covered in sweat to my mother's voice. I took a shower and went straight to Nana's room. All her belongings and possessions were gone as my father had donated them. I decided to visit her and took her favourite flowers to the cemetery, my father and I cried together remembering her. I could no longer listen to her voice, she finally left me and I never realised the severity and reality of her absence until this moment.

'Hey Michelle, I checked her birth certificate and you were right she was 80 before dying' my father said.

'Yeah dad! She was'

The clouds burst with rain as tears started to flow down my cheeks. The rage of winds blew the flowers from her grave and my father and I rushed to the car and left. I went to the garden to get the herb for strength and I heard a man's voice behind me.

'I want you to do something for me. Will you help me?'

My legs froze and my heart was pounding ten times more than normal. I picked my nana's garden scissors for defence and as I turned around I saw a spirit. There he was standing in front of me in his ghostly appearance.

'Please help me Agatha! I need your help'

~the end~