

MY THREE GRAND KIDS

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(After four years, I saw coming together of my family and three grandkids in my home; for long, it fell silent after my wife Mani passed away. Two younger ones she never saw and never will. On her fourth memorial, I strung a brief note about them, wishing their laughter would reach her â?? resting somewhere beyond our world.)

Itâ??s still dark outside; wrapped in a warm blanket, I felt too lazy to listen to: â??Good morning, time to wake up,â?• my lame voice, a bid to wake up and get started. Itâ??s been the routine listed in my morning agenda for about four years. Arriving in the sixties, I felt, isnâ??t an achievement to me, but Iâ??m proud of a few meaningful recourses that kept me self-driven. I follow a handful of right rituals that retirement quietness allows me: starting the dayâ??s work with meditation, wallow in new pursuits, learning something new every day affords me engaged. Perched before my computer, savoring the glowing pages online or editing the photographs, I rev up to endorse myself, â??Who Iâ??m, and the real me.â?• I never lazed in the bed more than necessary and credited myself an alert riser and never missed the morning Sun coming out every day.

Dear Mani,

I want to report the happy vibes, a brief pause in my routine, I have been enjoying â?? with our three grandkids â?? four years after your death startled us.

A few days back, three benevolent, naughty buds sabotaged my working norms. Of course, I invited it; itâ??s soothing and gifted the healing love on a platter inlaid with the sweetest smiles. Mani, I call you to watch the mixture of pain and joy in my eyes as I watched our three juniors, after disrupting my schedules, gallop about the room and with as much innocence as their fragile faces could gather, stare at your portraits and ask, â??Where did the grandma go.â?•

Let me introduce our brood: Aradhya, Abhiram, and Kaushal, not a silent moment spared without their frolics ransacking the house with their shrieks, smiles, and smartness. They fly around as if on beautiful wings, wrapped themselves in energy, laughter, and naivety. Our daughter landed from the US a fortnight ago, with Aradhya now six and Abhiram two years, frail and doll-like. Kaushal received them

with his parents â?? our son- and daughter-in-law â?? my custodians for the last ten months during the peak of the Covid pandemic crisis. Kaushal bounced around with broad smiles, meeting his cousins for the first time; he seemed to enjoy their company and competition.

Early one morning, a tiny outline emerged at my bedside. I heard a thin, rustling voice from behind the curtain, thatha, thatha (a vernacular equivalent of grandpa.) The crooning traveled fast and faintly knocked my sleepy inertia. I woke up and put on the lamp; the yellow light suddenly fell on the rolling eyes framed by a rounded face complete with hairs whipped in all directions and stood before me like a miniature Flintstone. Mani, let me flash before you the Abhiram, the youngest of the three â?? who came down jingling your spirit a year after you left. You know he has a knack for smiling and speaking with his eyes in one quick blend. It surprised me how he could be up so early; I give him a hand gesture, meaning, â??whatâ?•, for which, in low monosyllable sounds, waving his skinny hand led me to the living room. I followed him.

There I meet the other two young comrades, and their legs dangled sitting on the couch facing each other, stifling their giggles and with darting looks as if to suggest, â??We are up and ready with fun and play.â?• Their grins teased me as if they questioned my authority, â??is there anything you could do to stop us the ambit of naughtiness we could wreck.â?• In one look, I knew how they were ready to light up the day with their divine unregulated pranks, but I signaled them, I wonâ??t interfere. You very well know Mani, how I treated and approached children â?? my tolerance levels are amply generous, and I enjoyed them as much as they have had good times themselves pouncing about.

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Mani, you had gone too far away. How very much I temptingly pain myself to fantasize that you were around, listening to the kick and riot of the three weans teasing about our home. Can you step out once! Can you come down to witness the love and bonding that has sprouted and bloomed after your passing? Found weaving through Aradhya, Abhiram, and Kaushal â?? replacing your absence.

Aradhya, now six, has all the features to define herself as a tall girl. Her eyes speak of restive intelligence bound in the oval face, and the curly hair hung unruly at any given time of day. She keeps to herself mostly but quickly assumes a sullen face when asked by her mother about the worksheets left incomplete and irritation expressed in crayons scattered around her table. Whenever she isnâ??t with the other two kids, she sat and stared at her I pad, gaping at YouTube videos. Sometimes I noticed junk playing on the screen, but she seemed to follow some informative content too. Whenever I crossed her with corrective queries, she replied with her rolling eyes, pleading and evading. Although I felt never pleased with her avoiding tone, often, I helplessly concluded, â??Stubbornness is precast in kids, and I have no clue how to steer them.â?•

His frail fair body is filled with innocence; lean legs quick to bolt and knock out anything that stands in the way: pencils, crayons, bits of paper, books, paperweight, medicines, pillows, mats, flower pots, bins. This is how the two summersâ?? merry brain of Abhiram created havoc, no matter the many reprimands hurled; his destructive trail remained unstoppable, his fun-loving eyes always in flight as if meant to dislodge anything from its rightful place. A neatly mopped, disciplined living room, if Abhiram popped in, the next moment all the amenities lie scattered across as if an intense whirlwind played for a while and left.

Abhiram assumes a music lover version sometimes â?? he loves the melodies and to dance. Mani, the way he drools, a sentimental guess pops up; he may have picked himself a strand of music chord left by you. After he pushed open the door to my library, his tender hands too soft for such hardiness, but I

notice an eager strength in his eyes, his face relaxed, croons his way onto my lap, I feel the warm sponginess of his body settled against my chest. Two phonic lines tag his communication: a short jingle for yes, and long for no. And a pretty polite finger points at me, suggesting which button I need to press on my computer. There is a way he gives his â??no wordsâ?? request as he puts forth gestures directing me to play the melodies, often loud and non-stop. Throughout, he sits rapt and swaying his head briefly as if the rhythm and beat of the music are giving him good vibes. Once in a while, he turns back shoots a smile, as merry as any two-year could be â?? his small front teeth displayed resting on his lower shiny lip.

Kaushal stands still on the chair, his rounded three-year soft muscles leaning over the window, scanning the school compound below. His plump cheeks enclose his little mouth, often seen rattle all day long. He always seemed in a talking mode in spurts and bursts, drooling whatever his magical lips allowed, like a flowing brook. You pull your ears together â?? his hushed tones are giving off something unclear yet rhythmic, like the beat of raindrops on a metal. I never sized him as a toddler being ridiculous and noisy but mostly found him engaged swapping and turning illustrative, pop-up warm fuzzy childrenâ??s books. For his age, he stuns me, often filling a profile of a grown-up.

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Smiles follow wherever he runs, mostly spends time drawn into his imagination and the world of childrenâ??s books. I find him happy at small gestures I propose, like holding his hand for a walk. When he is angry, his tantrums take on a different mannerism: he screws his face to a crying mode, stomps his feet, runs around the house flapping his hands like a bird, the worried mother behind puzzled, unable to find the source of his hysterics.

Here let me pause a while and tell you, Mani, â??There canâ??t be anything more lovable than this, to watch the three kidâ??s antics, ringing in our home where I see visions of your glowing eyes â?? I know they still stayed leased about here â?? triumphantly blessing their souls.â•

On some nights, I watch all the three little ones run across the playground, and closeness stood out in their gestures, the silver tranquility of the moonlight shining on their faces. Following, I find their mothers chatting cautioning remarks not far behind. I watch them from the balcony, sprinting around in the sand and around the bushes. I overhear the laughter cracking over the soft breeze. Here is where I couldnâ??t restrain the spate of memories that assail me, Dear Mani; itâ??s heartwarming as I care for their noisy, playful pranks. They swing and dance, nothing to restrain them in the soft moonlight but their merriness. But there tiny growing brains unmindful that they are playing in the shadows where we built our relationship over three decades, not mindful of the memories of our intimate occasions that had happened and buried in the school premises. How difficult it was to brush aside those incisive thoughts; how unlucky our grandkids will be, never grow up and be able to hold your hand and walk on the same silvery sands that treasured the softness of your feet? I knew the spaces that surround the classrooms still echo the chime of the trinkets hidden behind the hem of your graceful sari â?? the way it beheld the respect and envy of many â?? the teacherâ??s group that followed and obeyed you as a leader.

Mani, finally, a word about me â?? I donâ??t dismiss a lone strand of burdened thought â?? that Iâ??m living alone on emotional crutches and, wading into the future, appears too painful even for an optimistic soul like me.

Yours

Eswar

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1. Uncategorized

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