

THE NEXT ENCOUNTER

MALIHA AKHTER

My shaking reflection on the glass,
Is neither dark nor vivid, rather something in between.
The rustling sound of the half-dried leaves passes the
double-decker bus.

The sun has long drowned in the sunflower field.
I'm on my way to meet myself.

As I plug in my headphones, a slow melody chimes.
But all I hear is that one heavy whisper.
All of a sudden, a warm drop of tear followed by
another fear,
Falls down on my cheek.
How am I going to meet myself?

I try to gently close my eyes, harshly shut my mind.
The whisper is descending, for now, I believe.
As I'm melting in my half-sleep,
The gloomy clouds gather, wipe away my reflection,
Leaving behind a long-lost fragrance.

I cannot meet myself just yet.

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PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

My Powerhouse, My Guiding Light

SAFWAT KHAIR RAYEEM

"Remember, everything in this world happens for a reason. You may be unclear about its purpose now, but you will eventually find out. Never lose faith in yourself."

I grew up listening to this saying by my *Dadu*, as I would lovingly call my grandmother, my biggest inspiration, my number one supporter, my first teacher and my greatest gift from God.

From her early years, life put her through the gravest of miseries, yet she refused to give in. After watching her husband sacrifice his life during the Liberation War, my grandmother was left all alone to raise four young children. She sold their family car and started a small job. She worked tirelessly, day and night, to ensure that all her children received proper education, healthy food and had shelter. For many years, she sacrificed many of her wishes, only to fulfil theirs. Even in times of great distress, she pushed through. She never let her children be aware of the financial crisis she had to bear. She was more concerned with the well-being of her loved ones than her own. A person who found happiness in the successes of her grandchildren and somehow never forgot our birthdays even when she was extremely ill. Selflessness, endurance, and diligence were not the only qualities she possessed. She was someone who made a difference in a time when life refused to be anything but full of hardships, and she still does so because of what she instilled in me.

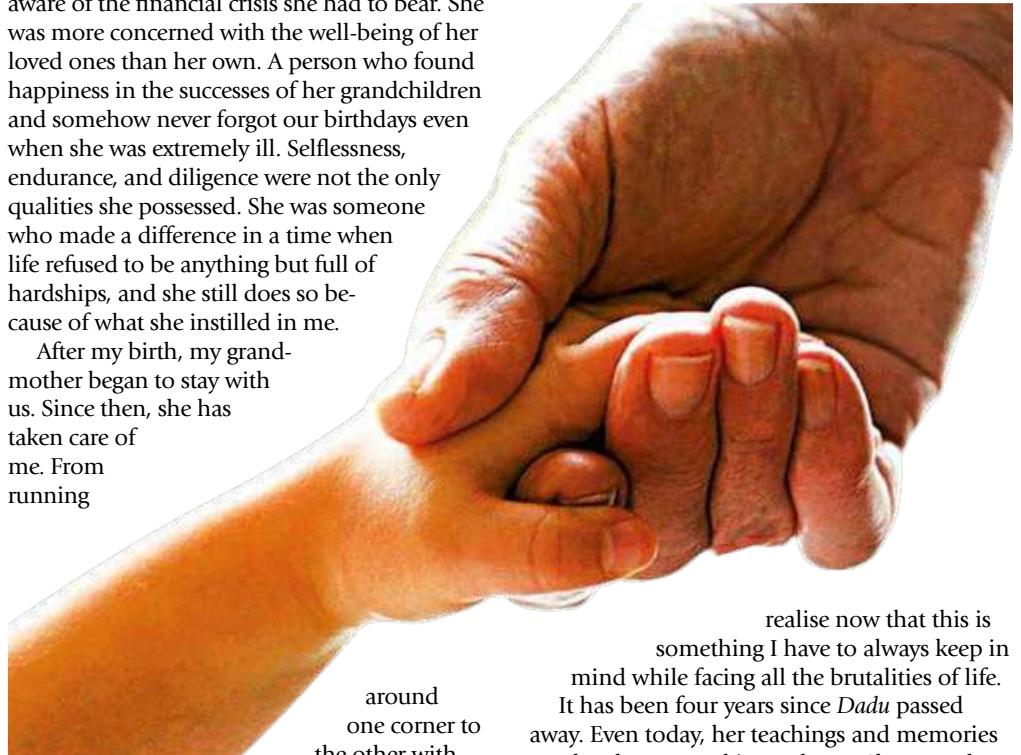
After my birth, my grandmother began to stay with us. Since then, she has taken care of me. From running

instil all her values and noble qualities in me.

Dadu was the reason I was able to overcome fear for the first time. I used to firmly believe that a robber or thief would come and murder me during my sleep. Yet, she easily convinced me into thinking thieves never target apartments. She could shed light into any perspective and I would take her word for it. If it were not for her, I would still be afraid of sleeping alone. She showed me that the real way of tackling fear is changing your approach towards it.

She taught me more about life and its repercussions than any counsellor ever could. She used to give me examples of her life where she learned the most valuable lessons. She taught me that it is imperative to always aim high in life, to never feel something is unachievable, to never think that the obstacles or setbacks are more significant than your goals.

"Never be afraid of failing in life. One cannot succeed in life without failing and then learning from it," said my grandmother. I



around
one corner to
the other with
food to tending to

every small wound, she effortlessly took up all the responsibilities simply because she loved to do so. She made sure I was never short of anything, whether it was food or toys or anything at all. She filled every void with her undying love and compassion. Throughout my childhood, I slept next to her in her room. At times, she would forget her sleep when I could not get mine. She would tell me fables and stories about her life and ruffle my hair till I fell asleep. She showered me with all the love in the world and always shielded me from getting scolded by my parents.

Growing up, my grandmother always ascertained to make me realise the power of education. Not only that, but she also made sure that I knew the importance of being a good human being; I was taught a lot about religion, studies, and demeanour. She endlessly endeavoured to

realise now that this is
something I have to always keep in
mind while facing all the brutalities of life.

It has been four years since *Dadu* passed away. Even today, her teachings and memories are deeply engraved in my heart. She was a beacon of strength and joy to everyone who knew her. Needless to say, the gravity of her presence in my life is unfathomable. The biggest regret I will have in life is that I could never do something that even comes close to all that she has done for me. Oh, how much I wish she were here to see how far I have come in life. Months, years and even decades may pass by, but the way her soul emboldens me with the spirit of holding my head high as I tackle every single barrier put in front of me shall remain constant.

Dadu inspires me to be better every day -- to be able to do justice to the part of her that lives within me. So that she always feels that no matter the day, her grandson will always make her proud.

This piece is a tribute to the writer's grandmother, who passed away on May 7, 2017.