

Memories - A Grief Journal

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2021

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Creative Writing and Poetics

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Abstract

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Memories – A Grief Journal is a memoir where a daughter writes letters to her deceased mother. In those letters, she reminisces her memories with her mother and what she wishes were different about it. She has also translated those letters to her native language 'Marathi' as she believes it is a medium of communication between her mother and her. The memoir reveals the deep bond shared between a daughter and her mother and how she overcomes her grief in the form of letters.

MEMORIES - A GRIEF JOURNAL

By Sanika Nalgirkar

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Prologue

The skyscrapers stood tall with their lights shining bright in the dark night. I leaned on the balcony fence and looked down from the 20th floor. The cars and the trees seemed so small from up here but even at this height, I could hear the noise from the busy street. I shivered as the cold wind touched my skin. I shivered again as I recognized the pride I felt in my accomplishments. I'm sure my mother would be proud of me too if she were here to see me today. With a sad smile, I went inside.

I went to the kitchen to make myself a steaming cup of tea. I grabbed the cup and let the tea warm my cold body. I wondered how different my life would be if my mother were still alive. Would she call me every day just to ask me how I am doing? Would she insist on visiting me every other month? Would she be my best friend? She would definitely insist that I keep practicing reading and writing in Marathi, my first language. As I have moved from India to abroad and then back to India, I have had a hard time learning how to read and write in my native language. Now, she would have been happy to see me write in Marathi. I smiled as I fell deep into my imagination.

I wanted to capture some of my mother's essence in a book so, I walked over to my desk and sat down. I put my mug down and grabbed my diary from one of the drawers. I opened it to a blank page and lifted my pen to write something. But, of course, I didn't know what to write. I sighed and put my pen down as I started thinking. There were so many memories with my mother, it was hard to pick just one or even just a few. I didn't want to only write down memories about my life. They were already there in my mind. I wanted to take a new approach. I wanted to

be creative and different. I wanted to document something that would make me smile when I read it years later. I dove deep into my memories looking for inspiration. There are many memories that I wish to change, but sadly I can't. I can change them only in my mind. Soon enough, I started thinking different versions or different possibilities of the times I have lived. I imagined my memories to change into something better or something different. I chose the memories which were the most important moments of my life or had an impact on me. However, all the memories aren't joyful. Many of them are filled with sadness, anger, and frustration so in order to avoid those negative emotions, I want to change them. However, I don't want to change them completely as they are the essence of my mother. As those are moments that happened in my life, I want to preserve them and my mother in my mind. After a while, an idea struck me, and I picked up the pen and started with the words,

'Dear Mom' And 'आई'

Once in English and once in Marathi.

A Bad Morning

Dear Mom,

I hope you are happy wherever you are. I know you would want to know, so let me tell you, I'm doing great. I was taking a stroll down memory lane and thought you would want to know about it.

One of my fondest and earliest memories with you was when I was 7 years old. It was the time I missed my school bus because the clock in our house was slow. I learned from my friend's mother who told me that my friend had left for school in the bus a while ago. I was so devastated that I started crying right there outside her house. She took me inside and tried to calm me down. You came to get me and dismissed the incident in a playful manner and reassured me that it would be alright to miss school for one day. Then we spent the entire day there, you talked to your friend while I watched all my favorite animated shows on TV.

I think that was the first time something like that had happened to me. I missed school for no particular reason and there wasn't anything I could do to fix it. The feeling of panic I had is still fresh in my mind. If I am prepared for something and it doesn't happen, I feel disheartened. In this case, I was so upset because I was already in my school uniform with my school bag and lunchbox, but I couldn't go to school.

You handled the situation well and cheered me up. Of course, it wasn't a difficult task as I was quite happy to miss school and watch my favorite animated shows all day. And, as I didn't go to school that day, I also didn't have any homework, which meant I could do whatever I wanted for the rest of the day.

There was, however, one thing I wish we would have done. I wish we would have gone out to watch a movie and do some shopping. It would have been a delight to go out with you and spend time. Now I know that in some ways, it would have been spoiling me. If we would have done that, I might have started pretending to be sick on a school day sometime in the future just so we could go out. I always had the idea that those things are meant to be done on the weekend so doing them on a weekday was something I always fantasized about.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

माझी डाशा आहे, तु जुश आशील। मी इएकदम मज्जेत आहे। मी जुने आवणी आवत होते। मी जेवांळ आव वर्षाची होती, तेवां माझी स्कूला school bus सुटली होती कारण आफ्ना घरावळ घडराळ खराब होतः। माझ्या मैत्रीणी च्या आई सांगील की माझी मैत्रीण school ला गेली। मी खुप रडले कारण माझी bus मीस झली। तीनी माला आव घेतलः आणि चुप करीलः जेवां परंत तु माला घालः घेत होती। तु माला बगीला आणि हसाय लागली। "एक दीक्स नाही गेली तर वातत" हे सांगुन माला हसिलः। दीक्स भर आपण तीयेव हातो, तु तुझ्या मैत्रीणी शी बोलत होती आणि मी tv वर कास्टुन बगत होते।

आसः काय पहिल्यांवा झालः होतः माझ्या सोबत। आजुन ही आवतः, मी खुप घाबरले होते आणि बरच लेट झलः होत, काय करु पन नाही शकलो। # School Uniform आणि Lunch bag सोबत तयार होते पण तरी school ला नाही गेले तर माला खुप वाट वाटलः।

पण तु माला cheer up केत आलो समझिला। शोझ्या वेळ सठीव, school उन सुटी मीळली अंझे माला तर मज्जा। दीक्स भर cartoons बगीतले आणि games खेळले आणि काय homework पण नात। त्या दीक्षी आपण कुठे बाहेर गेला आस्तो तर आजुन मज्जा आली अस्ती तुझ्या सोबत। ज्ञानां माला माहीती आहे, तरला काही मुलांन सोबत

नाही करावना चाहीजे । नंतर मी तर नाटक केला
डास्त की मी आजारी जाहे फक्त बाहेर जायला ।
ग्रामा नेहमी काढायच की हे सगळे गोष्टी
weekends मा करतात आणि weekday मा
करायच, आशी ईच्छा होती माही ।

काळजी घे,
मी

I wanted to scream out in frustration as I saw more math questions to solve. Mom wouldn't let me stop until I finished.

"Shouldn't I get ready for school now?" I asked Mom. She looked at the clock on the wall.

"Finish one last question and you can get ready." With a triumphant smile, I quickly finished the one question.

I got up hastily and put on my school uniform while Mom packed my school bag and lunch. I picked up my bags and happily waved a goodbye.

Outside my apartment building, I sat down on a bench to wait for my bus. Usually, one of my friends is there waiting for me, though today I was alone.

After a while, I got bored. To pass the time, I took a stroll around my apartment complex and stopped to pluck a couple of flowers. I approached a tiny garden that was within the sight of the bus stop so that I wouldn't miss it when it arrived. There were so many flowers: purple, pink, yellow, red and many more. My eyes caught a small purple flower, it was just the right size to fit in my fingers. I brought it closer to my nose, it smelled heavenly.

Almost half an hour had passed, and the bus still hadn't arrived, neither had my friend. So, I decided to go to my friend's house to see if she was going to school today or if she knew anything about the delay of the bus.

I rang the bell and waited patiently. Her mom opened the door.

"Hi Aunty! Is Riya home?" she scrunched her face in confusion.

"Riya already took the bus to school." I was shocked.

"Really? When?"

"It's been almost an hour and a half."

While feeling disappointed, I left her house. Walking back to my apartment, I started crying. I couldn't believe that I missed my bus. Now, it was probably too late for me to go to school at all.

I rang the doorbell. Mom opened the door and was puzzled to see me. I explained everything to her. She wiped my cheeks and let me in. I went to the bedroom and changed out of my school uniform. Just as I was unpacking my school bag, Mom came into the bedroom and told me it was her fault that I missed my bus. After some thought, Mom figured out that our wall clock was lagging, which was what made me late. The batteries had probably worn out.

"I am so sorry," she said and hugged me tightly. "It was my fault that you missed your bus." I turned away from her with a sour face.

I went out to the living room with a frown as I was quite upset with her. It wasn't really her fault, but I was a 7-year-old child who needed someone to blame. I turned the TV on and switched the channel to some movie. Mom came out to the living room and giggled knowing I was still upset at her and for some reason she found it amusing.

After a while, Mom told me go get ready. She said that she had to go out and couldn't leave me alone in the house. I begrudgingly went to the bedroom and got ready. I didn't want to go out. I just wanted to go to school.

First, we went to the hair salon. Mom had an appointment. As I walked in, a strong smell of shampoo and conditioner welcomed me. I went to the couch on the side and picked up a magazine still with a sour look on my face.

"If I were you, I would be happy that I got a day off from school," Mom said as she giggled.

I thought and realized, a day off could be a good thing. School wasn't exactly my favorite place, but I enjoyed going there. Mostly, I just hate it when something disrupts my routine.

After Mom's haircut, we went shopping. As always, she bought a lot of things. But, this time, she let me get some things too. I got new clothes, dolls, and games. Normally, Mom wouldn't be so generous with me however, today, she let me get what I wanted. Maybe, she was still feeling guilty.

After shopping, we went to eat pizza. By this time, my face had the biggest grin on it. Pizza has always been one of my favorite foods. The cheesy smell made my stomach grumble. I picked up the soft yet hard crust of the pizza and took a bite so quickly that I burned my mouth. Mom had advised caution but, I didn't listen.

Later, we went to the cinema theatre to watch a movie. This time I knew it was something special just for me as we watched an animated movie, something Mom would never consider.

By the time we went home, it was almost nighttime. Mom and I had spent the entire day together. I was exhausted from walking around so much, but I felt great. It was a day I would never forget.

"I had fun today," I told Mom with a wide grin.

"Me too," Mom replied with a smile.

"Maybe I should miss school more often," I joked while she just laughed.

Mom probably thought I was saying that because of the new stuff she bought for me but really I was saying it because I got to spend so much time with her.

While I Was Sleeping

Dear Mom,

Did you ever have trouble sleeping? If you did, you never told me. When I miss you sometimes, I have sleepless nights which I fill with writing or reading. Nights are my favorite as it is such a quiet and calm time. There is no one to disturb me or my train of thoughts.

Speaking of sleep, do you remember the time when Riya came to our house for a sleepover? She insisted on sleeping next to you during the night. I'm sure you remember.

Riya stayed over for a few days because her parents were out town. As Riya was my best friend then, I thought I would have the best time. We could have the entire day devoted to fun as we had summer holidays. Of course, that feeling was short-lived when she said she wanted to sleep next to you at night. I didn't want to say 'yes' for one second because I wanted to sleep next to you myself. I was only 7 years old and hadn't learned to sleep without you yet. However, Riya's authoritative tone and the fear of her despising me made me agree.

That was the first time I developed a feeling of animosity towards my best friend. I never realized that she might do something like that to me. That day, I was looking forward to spending some quality time with her, but she ruined it all.

That night, I had to sleep away from you, and it was pure torture for me. I woke up in the middle of the night and felt completely alone and scared.

The next day was spent playing games, watching movies, and eating junk food. However, when bedtime came, nothing had changed. Riya still wanted to sleep next to you. I still didn't want to agree with her, but in the end, I conceded. I convinced myself that it was

alright, and she was going back to her house the following evening, so it was just one more night. And that night was no different either, I again woke up in the middle of the night feeling alone.

The next day, Riya went home, and I was relieved. I told you everything after she left. You weren't surprised at all to hear how I felt about it. You said I should've told you before, you would've slept next to me without letting Riya know. I didn't think that you could've done anything, and that's why I didn't tell you at the time. Maybe I should've told you earlier, maybe you would've done something for me. One of the things I wish I had done, without actually disagreeing with Riya, was to squeeze between the two of you when I woke up in the middle of night. I thought about it then but feared how Riya might react.

It's been several years since that incident. Now, I don't have any trouble sleeping at night. So, don't worry about me.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

तुला कधी झोपायला त्रास झाला? तु कधी माला सांगील नाही। माला तुझी कधी आवण येते तर रात्री झोप नाही येत, पण मी पुस्तक वाचते तर झोप येते। माला रात्र खुप आवडत कारण खुप शांत आस्त। कोणी माला त्रास द्यायला नाही।

तुला आर्गेत का, एकदा रीया घरी आली होती, आल्या बकडे राहयला। तीला रात्री तुझ्या बाजूला झोपायच होत। तुला आवत आसेल।

रीया चे आई-बाबा बाहेर गेले होते मणुन ती थोडे दीवसा सरी आली होती, तेवा ती माझी खास मैत्रीण होती मणुन माला खुप उत्सुकता होती। मी वीचार पण करुन ठेवल होत की आमी काय-काय करणार, पण लवकरच ती उत्सुकता गेली। ती मणली होती की रात्री तीला तुझ्या जवळ झोपायच आहे। माला 'हो' नैत मणायच कारण माला तुझ्या जवळ झोपायच होत। मी सात वरशा ची होती आणी तुझ्या शीव झोपायला, सवय नैती, पण मी रीया ला हो मणल।

माला पहीलेदा रीया आवडली नाही। माला वाटल नाही की ती आस काय करेल। त्या रात्री तुझ्या उन लाम्ब झोपुन माला विलकुल नाही आवत दुसरा दीवशी, रीया आणी मी खुप मज्जा केली पण रात्री, तीला तुझ्या जवळच झोपायच होत, ती दुसरे दीवशी घरी जाणार होती मणुन मी

स्वताला समझज्ज घेतल । आणी त्या रात्री पण
मी मध्ये उठली ।

जेवा रीया घरी गेली, मी खुप खुश होते ।
मी तुला नंतर, सगळ सांगील । तु मणली, मी
तुला पहिले सांगायच होत, तु रीया ला ना
सांगता माझ्या बाजूला झोपली आस्ती, तेवा
माला वाटल नाही की तु काई करु शकली
आस्ते, मणून मी काई मणल नाही । मी तुला
सांगायला पाहीजे होत, तु काइतरी केळ आस्ता ।
माझी एक ~~इच्छा~~ इच्छा होती की मी रीया ला
न सांगता, तीच्या आणी तुझ्या मध्ये झोपली होती ।
मी तेवा विचार केळ होत पण भीती वाटत होती
की रीया चीड-चीड करेल ।

हेला हुन खुप वशी झाले । आता माला रात्री
छान झोप ~~स~~ येते । तु माझी काळजी नोको घु

काळजी घे,
मी

I don't think I have ever been so excited for something. My best friend, Riya, was coming for a sleepover. Her parents were out of town, so she was going to stay at my place for a couple of days. I was already thinking of the things we would do together such as watching movies and playing board games.

In the evening, Riya's mother came to drop her off. I immediately took her to the bedroom. She had brought a big bag of belongings which included some of her toys and games. After she unpacked her stuff, we settled into playing a card game and chatting. Riya was a little sad that she would be away from her mom for so long. I tried to cheer her up.

"Don't worry. We will have a lot of fun. And since we have holidays, we don't even have to go to school. You won't even miss your mom," I said with a cheery tone.

"Yea. You're right. We will have a lot of fun," she said with a smile.

I smiled back, however my smile was wiped away when I heard what she said next.

"I sleep next to my mom every day," she said. I knew that as I slept next to Mom too. "And since she isn't here, I don't want to feel lonely, so I feel like I should sleep next to your mom for the next couple of days."

"What? Why? I always sleep next to my mom," I argued back. I didn't want her to sleep next to Mom.

"Well, my mom isn't here so, I don't want to sleep on the edge of the bed," as she said that, I felt a little bad for being selfish. "And you would be in the same bed as your mother, just not next to her."

I sighed and agreed. I convinced myself that it wouldn't be that bad. Mom would be there with me, just not right next to me.

Soon we had dinner and went to bed. I slept on the edge of the bed, Riya next to me and Mom next to her. That night I had a bad dream.

Mom and I were going somewhere, and we came across a tall, white building. We walked into one of the rooms. Mom dropped my hand and started walking away. I yelled to stop her, but she just kept going. She had left and now, I was completely alone. My heartbeat rose and I began to panic. Soon, the door to the room disappeared, then the window, and then the room started shrinking. The walls were closing in on me.

I jolted my eyes open. The nightmare woke me up.

I tightened my grip on my blanket and pulled it over me, but I couldn't get back to sleep. I looked out the window and realized that it was far from morning, maybe 2 or 3 am. Without thinking much further, I got up and squeezed myself between Riya and Mom. Within a few minutes, I was out like a light.

The next morning, I opened my eyes to see the sun shining through the window. I looked next to me, but Mom wasn't there. She had probably gotten up; I could hear utensils being moved around in the kitchen.

Soon after, Riya opened her eyes and saw me there, on the other side of the bed. She looked confused.

"How did you get on this side?" she asked me.

"Don't know," I said with a light tone. I lied. I didn't want to say that I did it on purpose after telling her that it was alright for her to sleep next to Mom. Fortunately, she didn't question my response.

We spent the day exactly as I had imagined. Riya and I watched animated shows and movies on TV, played board games, and went out to play with our other friends. And because Riya was visiting, Mom let us order pizza for dinner.

However, as the time for bed came closer, I became sad as I knew Riya would still not let me sleep next to Mom. I didn't know how to say no to her or disagree. I didn't want her to dislike me.

So, I went to Mom and told her. She was still watching TV and didn't plan to sleep any time soon.

"Riya said she wants to sleep next to you, but I want to sleep next to you," I complained to her.

"Don't worry. Go to sleep and I will sleep next to you," she told me. I scrunched my face in confusion and she saw that. "Just go," she insisted.

I sighed and went to bed. Just like the day before, Riya made me sleep on the edge of the bed. She slept in the middle leaving the space next to her vacant for Mom. I wondered how Mom would be able to sleep next to me; there was no space.

I went to sleep but lightly opened my eyes when I felt movement. It was Mom, she was trying to move me a little so that she could sleep next to me. I lightly smiled and went back to sleep knowing Mom was sleeping next to me.

The next morning Mom smiled and said to me, "See. I told you, I would sleep next to you."

I smiled back to her and nodded. I don't know why I had such a hard time sleeping away from Mom even though she was on the same bed. It's not like we talk or do anything at night. We just sleep, I don't even know where she is after I have fallen asleep. She makes me feel comfortable by just being next to me. I feel protected from everything even when I don't know that I need her protection.

The Television Is Working Again

Dear Mom,

I was thinking about my favorite animated shows from childhood. There were so many good TV shows when I was a kid. I feel like there aren't as many good ones today. I feel grateful for that when I see the shows kids watch today. As a kid, I watched the television all the time and I knew you hated that. Even I agree that it was a lot. I enjoyed watching cartoons and movies so much that I became addicted to it.

I still remember the time when I got sick, and the television wasn't working. I was in bed for a whole day and hadn't watched the television at all. You called the store and asked for someone to come and repair it. After the person left, you woke me up for dinner, but I didn't want to leave the bed. I still felt sleepy, but you picked me up and sat me down in front of the television. You fed me food and turned it on. It was working again, and you put on *Cartoon Network*. My favorite show, *Tom & Jerry*, was playing. My sleepy eyes widened a little after watching that. I felt a little energized as after sleeping in the bed for the entire day, my brain had become numb.

I know if you had the chance, you would probably have delayed the repair of the television. You would be happy to have some peace and quiet in the house and my eyes would get the break they deserve from the screen. You hated my habit of watching TV all the time, but you still did that for me.

After a while, my friends also came to check up on me. I appreciated that but, I wish they hadn't come. I was enjoying my time watching TV and eating the food you fed me. I was in no shape to see anyone because I looked like I hadn't slept or showered in days. After a few days, when I was better, my friends told me how terrible I looked that day. I hated them for judging me like that. I knew I didn't look the best because I was sick. There was

no need for them to judge me and even if they were, they should've just kept it to themselves. It made me feel bad about myself. Even though that moment was disturbed by my friends, it is one of my favorite memories.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

मी लाहानपणी चे माझे आवडती कार्यक्रम आवत होते। खुप छान-छान tv. shows आसायचे, आज केल तर खुप बकास आस्तात। मी छोट्टी आस्ताना ते सगळ बगायची, हे वीचार करून चांगल वाटत। मी लाहानपणी खुप त.व. बगायची आणी तुला ते बिलकुल माही आवडायच। माला पण वाटत की मी खुप बगाडची। माला खुप आवडायच की तेच नाव लागल।

माला एकदा नाप झाला होतः आणी तेवांच त.व नौत चालत। मी दीवसभर bed वर होती आणी त.व. पण नौत बगीतल। तु दुकानात फोन केल आणी कोणाला तरी बोलौल। नंतर माला उठौलः आणी त.व. च्या समोर बसौलः। माला जेऊ घातल आणी त.व. चालु केल। आता त.व. चालु होत आणी तु माझे आवडते, Tom & Jerry लावल। ते बगुन माझे डोळे आजुन उगडले। दीवस भर झोपणा नंतर आता चांगल वाटत होत।

तुला जमल आस्त तर तु मूद्दामुन उशीर केला आस्त। माला आणी माझ्या डोळे ना त.व. पासुन थोड आराम मीळाल आस्त। पण तु ठीक करौल, माला खुश करायला।

थोद्या वेळात माझे मैत्रीणी पण घरी झाले, भेटायला। ते नस्त आले तर माला आजुन बरः वाटल आस्त। त.व. बगता-बगता जेवण करत होते, तर चांगल वाटत होत। माला कोणाशी भेटायच नौत कारण मी दीवसभर झोपुन होते आणी आंघोळ पण नौत केल।

थोडे दीवसा नंतर, माझ्या मैत्रीणी नी सांगितल की त्या दीवशी मी कीती खराब दीसत होते । माला खुप व्हाइट वाटल । माला माहीती होत की चांगली नौती दीसत करण माला बर नौत वाटत । तेन्ना ते अगळ मणाइची काय गरज होती, शांत राहीले आस्ते ।

T.V. बघता - बघता जेवळ करण: माझ आवडतीत आठवण आहे । तेवां तर कळालं पण नाही की सौंड्या वरशा नंतर आस आवैणार ।

कालजी धे,
मी

I laughed as I saw the big, blue cat and the tiny, brown mouse wearing clothes to the beach. *Tom and Jerry* was one of my favorite shows to watch. So much so, that my eyes were always stuck to the TV. Mom hated that I watched so much TV and would get angry at times.

"It's bad for your eyes," she would always reprimand me, but I would never listen.

She grabbed the remote from the table and turned the television off.

"Enough TV. Go to bed," she said with a stern voice.

"But that episode is almost over. Only 5 minutes more," I tried convincing her.

"No. Go to bed now!" I didn't want to make her angry, so I quietly went to the bedroom to sleep.

The next day, after eating my breakfast, I planted myself in front of the TV. I pressed on the button on the remote and all I could see was static. Why was there static? I tried turning it off and on again several times, but the static didn't leave. I called Mom.

"What happened to the TV?" I asked. She scrunched her eyebrows after looking at the static.

"Hmm, I don't know," she mumbled as she grabbed the remote and did the same thing I had done earlier. Again, nothing happened. "I'll have to call the electronics store for someone to repair this," Mom said nonchalantly and went to the kitchen.

"When will you call them?" I asked as I followed her.

"I will call later," she said.

"Why don't you call them now?" I insisted.

"I will call them later. This way, the TV will be silent for some time," she said with a smile.

"And you will get a break from it too," she said as she was cleaning the kitchen.

"What should I do till then?" I complained.

"There are so many things to do. You could study, read books, or call one of your friends and go play with them." I groaned at all of those options. I really wanted to watch *Tom and Jerry* at that very moment. But seeing as I had no other option, I took out one of my books to read.

I didn't realize how the entire day flew by. Soon, it was evening, so I went out to play with my friends. After going home, I was feeling tired, so I just ate dinner and went sleep without knowing what the situation with the TV was.

The next day, I opened my eyes and still felt tired from last night. I wanted to go back to sleep but, I knew I had to get up to go to school. I sleepily walked up to the wash basin. I picked up my toothbrush and brushed my teeth while my eyes were drooping. My eyes jerked open when I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Mom.

"What's wrong? Are you feeling sleepy?" I nodded. She scrunched up her eyebrows. "Why are you still feeling tired? Are you sick?" she said as she touched my forehead. "Oh no! you have fever." I put my toothbrush away.

"hmmm." I just nodded in agreement unknowingly.

"Okay. Go back to bed. You're not going to school today." I walked back to the bed feeling a little happy that I wouldn't have to go to school.

Mom came into the room to give me food and the medicine for my fever. After that, my head hit the pillow and I forgot about the world around me.

When I slightly opened my eyes, the room was dark and the sky from the window looked dark blue. It was almost night. I could hear some voices outside. I assumed Mom had a guest over. I knew I should have gotten up as I had been in bed for the entire day, but I just went back to sleep.

After a while, Mom woke me up gently and told me to get out of the bed.

"Come on. Get up. I have a surprise for you," she said.

I got up and sat on the bed with my eyes still droopy. Mom picked me up and took me to the living room. She put me down on the couch while she went to the kitchen. When she came back, she had a plate of food for me. She sat next to me and switched the TV on. The static was gone, I could see all the channels working as Mom flipped through them. She stopped on *Cartoon Network*. I smiled when I saw my favorite show playing. I enjoyed *Tom and Jerry* as Mom fed me food.

The television was working again.

A Gift For Someone Special

Dear Mom,

After you left me, I felt really bad when I saw other kids with their mothers. Those moments just made me realize, I would never have that. I would never get the chance to talk to nor spend time with you. Even though you aren't here today, I celebrate Mother's Day every year or at least try to. I still have the gifts I had given you on Mother's Day when I was 11 years old. That was the first time I had gotten something for you. I wish you could've taken them with you. Nonetheless, they remind me of you: the teddy bear and the heart-shaped cushion.

We had gone to the mall because you wanted to do grocery shopping. While you did that, dad and I went to another store to buy gifts. Since you were there, you already knew I had gotten something for you. I didn't really have any other choice as dad was available only on weekends and I needed him to buy the gifts.

When we went home, I rushed to the balcony with all the things I had bought. The balcony was the only place I could have complete privacy from you. You tried to look through the glass door, but I forbade you. Even though you knew I had something for you, I wanted the contents to be a surprise. When I gave you those gifts, you were very happy even though they were just soft toys.

Now that I think about it, the gifts I gave you that day weren't personal at all. They were just something I saw at a store and bought. As I got older, I realized the importance of giving personal gifts. Something like the photo I have of you and me during Diwali. We are sitting on the couch in our Indian attire. I could've put this in a frame or used it in some kind of video montage.

I know you still loved the gifts and would still love them if I gave it to you today because they came from me. But I really wanted the chance to give you something more meaningful. If you were here today, I would give you something with the money I have earned. I wish I had that chance.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

तु जेवां माला सोडून गेली, माला खुप व्हाइट वाटायच जेवां मी दुसरे मुलांना तेच्या आई सोबत बगाडची। तेवां माला कळायच की हे सगळे माला कधी नाही मीळणार। आज तु इथे नाही आहे पण मी दर वर्शी Mother's day साजरे करतं। मी नुला हीलेले गोष्टी आजून ही आहे साड्या कडे। मी अका वर्शांची होती। तु तुझ्या सोबत घुमूण जाउ शकली जास्त तर कौड घेन। माला हे बसून तुझी आठवण येते - ते teddy bear आणि heart वाली उशी।

आपण सगळे माला ला गेलो होतो कारण तुला घरच्या सही साशन घ्याच होत। तु ते करत होती तर बाबा आणि मी दुसरा दुकानात गेलो। तुझ्या सही काई तरी घेणार आहोत हे तर तु माहीती होत। बाबा ला आजून कुदल्या हीवशी वेळ नोंता तर तेवांच घ्यावा लागल।

जेवां घरी गेलो, मी पटकन सगळे घुम Balcony ला गेली आणि दरवाजा बंद केला। तु काचेच्या दरवाजे मी बघायच प्रयतन केले पण मी तु नाई बघू हील। नुला माहीती होत की तुझ्या सही काइतरी आणल आहे पण काय आणल आहे, हे तरी surprise ठेवायच होत। तुला माझ हीलेले gift खुप आवडल, ते जास्त खास पण नोंत।

ते गोष्टी जास्त खास नोंते। ते आशय दुकानात काइतरी बगीला आणि तुला हील। मी जाता मोठी जाली आहे तर माला खास घेत ची

महत्व कळत आहे । माझ्या कडे हे एक फोटो आहे आपल्या दोघांच हीवाळी च्या वेळस । मी हीखा घागा घातला आहे आणि तु मुलाची साडी । हे फोटो कुठे तरी वापरला आस्ता, video मधे का frame मधे ।

माता महीती आहे मी तुला आज पण तेच soft toys हीले तर तु खूप आवडेल कारण मी तुला हील आहे । पण तुला काइतरी खास द्यायच होत माला । तु ईशे आज आस्ली आस्ती तर तुला माझ्या पेशेनी काइतरी हील आस्तः ।

काळजी घे,
मी

My dad and I were at the mall. I wanted to get a gift for Mom on Mother's Day. Mom wasn't here, she had gone to her friend's house and would come back home in the evening. So, I thought this is a good chance to get her a gift. My dad and I were just wandering around the mall because we had no idea what to get her. She would like anything I got her but, I wanted to get her something special.

The mall was crowded as it was a Sunday as well as Mother's Day and because of that, there were many sales. There were huge banners outside of most of the stores saying "50% off", "70% off", or "buy 1 get 1 free". As we walked around, I saw a store that was selling soft toys which said, "I love you Mom" or "Happy Mother's Day". I wanted to get something like that for Mom.

"Dad!" I called out to my father. He was talking to someone on the phone. So, I waited till he was done. He quickly hung up and came to me.

"What happened? Did you find something?" he asked me.

"Yes. I want to go in that store," I said while pointing to the store selling the soft toys. He looked at where I was pointing.

"Okay! Let's go." We proceeded towards the store.

I felt like this was a store for Valentine's Day gifts as the colors, red and white were used so much. Almost all the toys had those two colors. The store was huge so, I had a lot of options to choose from. I spent a lot of time walking through isles trying to find the perfect gift. My dad kept bringing me different options but, I didn't like any of them. Finally, I chose something I was satisfied with. I chose a medium-sized white bear with a heart in his hands that read "Happy Mother's Day", a pretty white photo frame with hearts, and lastly, I got a pink and white card which already had a poem. And of course, a lot a gift-wrapping paper.

I had a huge grin on my face as I walked out of the store with the bags. We quickly went home as I didn't want Mom to see the gift.

After we went home, I rushed to my bedroom with the bags. I grabbed the scissors and tape. I sat on the floor and got to work. I took everything out and started organizing it accordingly. It was hard to wrap the teddy bear and the frame together so, I decided to wrap it separately. Looking at the frame, I grabbed the photo I wanted to use from my closet.

It was a photo of Mom and me sitting on the couch during Diwali. Mom was wearing a pink *Saree* while I was wearing a traditional Indian, green-colored skirt with a matching blouse.

I was so involved with what I was doing, I didn't even realize how much time I spent on it. After I was done, I looked at the result and it was a mess. The wrapping paper was not cut properly and there was too much tape on it. The paper around the bear barely covered it and it looked like, it was going to come off. I spent so much time trying to perfect it that I ruined it.

I sighed and went to the living room. My dad was watching the television. Mom hadn't returned yet, but she would soon. Just to surprise her, I grabbed all the gifts and kept it on the dining table in the living room so that she would see it the minute she walked in.

I just hope Mom likes it even though I made a complete mess of the wrapping.

Soon, I heard the jingling of the keys coming from outside. She was here. I got up and stood near the door. She came in and smiled when she saw me. She closed the door and came in the living room.

"Happy Mother's Day," I said with a smile.

"Thank you!" she said as she came to hug me.

She let me go and noticed the gifts on the table. She advanced towards it and gasped.

"This is from me to you," I said with a smile.

She opened the gifts with a wide grin. She loved it and didn't seem to notice the mess at all.

"I love it! This is the best gift I've gotten. And this frame is going on my bedside table," She said as she held up the frame and went towards her room.

I grinned wide with excitement. She loved my gift!

Music Is Art

Dear Mom,

What did you do in your free time? I like to sing or listen to music. I even joined music classes when I was 12 years old. Even you joined soon after me. I stopped singing shortly after you left because that was something you and I shared, and I didn't feel like continuing it without you.

This was when we lived in South Africa. Dad and you had met another Indian family that lived there. They had a daughter, Maya, whom I became friends with. One evening, we went to their house for dinner. Dad and you started chatting with your friends in the living room while Maya and I went to her room. I assumed we would watch a movie, but she started talking about music and showed me all the instruments she played. I pretended to show interest as music wasn't something I wanted to do nor did I have any curiosity. She said she practiced music everyday as her mom is a music teacher.

She showed me the music room they had in their house and started playing an instrument while singing. At first, I was just listening to her quietly, but she insisted that I sang along. I couldn't refuse and started singing too. After a while, I started to enjoy it. I sang with more excitement and vigor. Hearing that, her mom and you came into the room.

After singing for a little while, Maya's mom asked me if I wanted to join her music classes. I didn't know what to say in that moment, so I just looked at you. I had never made a decision entirely by myself. You rescued me by saying we would let them know later.

I eventually agreed, however I was very nervous to be doing something like that as I was shy as a kid. Of course, you knew that. It was the first time I had decided something

entirely by myself. I didn't know any of the other students who would be in my class. Everything was new to me so for the first few classes, I was a nervous wreck.

I wished that you would have joined the class with me, just for support, but you didn't. You let me do it alone just so I could break out of my shell. I'm glad you did that because it helped me become a little bit independent. It was something I had of my own. I made new friends and learnt so many new things. You eventually joined the classes but thank you for letting me have those couple of months to myself. It really helped me in my self-discovery. I'm so grateful that I learnt singing even if it was for a little while. Just like writing, I feel like music is a place where I can be myself.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

तु तूझ्या मोकळा वेळत काय कराडची । माला गाणे आईकायला खुप आवडत । मी 12 वरशा ची आस्ताना गाणेच्या classes ला जायची । तुला जाणत ? आपण सोबत जाडचो । नु गेले मंतर मी गाणा सोडुन दिल कारण तूझ्या शीवे माझ मन नोंत लागत ।

आपण दक्षीण Africa ला राहत होतो । तुम्हाला जाणून एक भारतीय कुटुंब भेटल होत । तेची एक मुलगी होती, माया तीच्या सोबत माझी मैत्री झाली होती । एकदा तेन्नी आपल्याला रात्री जेवायला बोलायला होत । तुम्ही सगळे मोठे बोलाय लागले तर माया आणि मी तीच्या खोलीत गेलो । माला वाटल आमी काई घोकचर बाजार पण ती गाणे आणि संगीत बद्दल बोलायल लागली । मी Interest दाखवायच नादक केल । तेवां माला संगीत माधे योंड काई आवड नोंती । ती मणाली ती रोज संगीत ची रीड्याज करणे कारण तीची आई संगीत ची teacher आहे ।

तीनी माला तेच्या घराचः संगीत खोली दाखोली आणि गाणः मायला चालु केल । तीनी माला पण मायला मणाल पण मी नाही मायलो । तीनी परत मणाल तर मी चालु केलः । शोशा वेळानी माला आवडायल लागलः । ते आडकुन तु आणि तीची आई खोलीत आले ।

शोशा वेळानी तीच्या आई मी विचारल की माला तीचः class चालु कराडच आहे का नाही । माला तर काही कळत नोंत तर मी तूझ्या कडे बघीतल ।

तु मणली आमी नंतर विचर करुन सांगु।
मी नंतर हो मणली पण माला खुप श्रीती
वाटत होते काइतरी नविन करायला। तुला तर
माहीती आहे मी लाहानपणी कोडी शांत होती।
मी पहील्यादा स्वताहुन नीरणय घेतला। मी
class मध्ये कोणाला पण ओळखत नाती, पहीले दोन-
तीन वेळस तर खुप घाबरलेली होते।

तेवा तु माझ्या सोबत class चालु केला
आस्ता तर माला चांगल वाटल आस्त। तु माला
एकट करुन दिल तर मी नविन लोकांशी भेटल।
माला नंतर छान वाटल की माझ स्वता च
काइतरी आहे। मी एकट राहुन खुप काई शिकले।
तु नंतर classes चालु केले पण ते थोडे महीने
माला दिले, हेच धंयवाद। माझ्या सठी संगीत
लीण्या सारख आहे। एक जागा आहे जीथे मी,
मी आसु शकते।

काळजी घे,
मी

"Hi!" I greeted my friend Maya as I entered her house. I had known her for a while now. My parents and her parents knew each other. They were one of the first Indian families we got acquainted with when we moved to South Africa a couple of months ago.

They had invited us for dinner. Maya and I went to her bedroom as the adults sat down to talk. We planned to watch a movie on her computer. She showed me the different DVDs she had.

"Let's watch *High School Musical*," I said with excitement. She took the DVD and put it in the CD drive.

"Have you seen this movie before?" She asked me.

"Yes. It is one of my favorite movies. The soundtrack is really great," I told her.

She seemed to like the movie more than I did. She knew almost all of the dialogues and sang along the songs. Her voice was amazing, it sounded just as good as the original.

"You're a really good singer," I told her as the end credits were playing.

"Thanks," she said as she smiled. "My mother makes me practice every day. She is a music teacher so, she is quite strict with me. Come, I'll show you the music room we have," she said as she got up from the bed and waited for me to follow her. I followed her into another room which was the music room. It was small and cozy just enough for a teacher and a couple of students.

There was carpet on the floor so, it was quite warm. There were two brown drawer cabinets on each side of the room and a couple of posters on the walls with pictures of classical singers. Lastly, there was a harmonium on the carpeted floor with a couple of books lying around the room.

"This is the music room," Maya said as I was still admiring the room.

"It's quite nice," I said.

"Do you want to sing or play the instrument?" she asked me as she went and sat down in front of the harmonium.

"I have never played the harmonium before," I said as I sat down.

"Okay. I'll play. You can sing along." She started playing the instrument and singing at the same time.

She was singing a Hindi song that I had heard of so, I started singing with her. I was enjoying myself as I sang with her.

Probably hearing that we were singing, Mom and Maya's mom came into the room. They sat down next to us and waited for us to finish the song.

"You sing really good. Have you ever sung before?" Maya's mom asked. She gestured Maya to move as she wanted to sit in front of the instrument.

"No," I said and shook my head.

"Okay. I am going to play *Sa Re Ga Ma*. See if you can sing along," she said, and I knew what she was talking about. I had heard singers sing classical notes on TV. It was just like *Do Re Mi*, but the words were different. I sang along with her as she played it on the harmonium, and she sang softly to guide me. After that, she made me sing a couple of songs.

"That was really good," Maya's mom told me. I looked at Mom and she was smiling at me.

"Do you want to join my class?" she asked me while I looked shocked. I didn't expect her to ask me that. I felt like it was hard for me to decide to right away. I just looked at Mom and she understood what I wanted to say.

"She will think and tell you later," Mom told Maya's mother.

"Okay. No problem," Maya's mother said with a smile and we all got up to leave the room.

I was terribly shy and scared of trying anything new, that is why I was so skeptical about it. I didn't really know Maya nor her mom that well and if I did join the class, there would be other students. Who would they be? How would they be? Maybe, they would be much better than me or maybe they would make fun of me if I got something wrong. All these thoughts were racing through my mind on the way back.

We reached home and I went to my room to sleep. I didn't want to think about this anymore, at least not now.

The next couple of days went by smoothly without Mom prodding me about my decision. After a while though, she came to my room to ask me about it.

"Hey," she said as she popped into my room.

"I know why you are here." I sighed and gave her a blank face.

"Why am I here?" she asked me as she sat down on my bed.

"To know about my decision," I said.

"You're right," she said calmly. "It's been a while. What do you think?"

"I don't know. I am so confused." I sighed.

"Well, if you're taking so much time to decide, that means you don't really want to do it," she said.

I just looked at Mom silently. That made sense. It was a simple yes or no decision. Why was I taking so long?

"Okay. Then, I'll call and say 'no'," Mom said as she picked up her cellphone to call Maya's mom. But, something about that made me feel disappointed and sad. She put the phone to her ear.

"STOP!" I said a little louder than usual. Mom smiled and put her phone down. She showed me her phone display which clearly showed that she wasn't really going to call her.

"Now, tell me what's the problem?" she asked me.

"I am scared to join because there will be people I don't know," I said.

"So, you will make new friends," she encouraged me.

"No, they will just make fun of me if I get something wrong," I said.

"How will you know that if you never join the class? It's all a part of learning. You will be scared for a while but, you will also have so much fun," she said

I sighed and gave it more thought. Mom spoke up seeing me in turmoil.

"What if I joined with you?" I looked up at her. "Would you join the class then?"

I smiled and nodded my head vigorously.

"Great," she said and left the room.

My Best Friend

Dear Mom,

Do you remember when I joined music classes? Maya's mom was my music teacher. She even forced me to go to the school choir. I enjoyed singing but I didn't like the fact that I was forced to do it. She was too strict with me, even more than you. I always thought that if you weren't strict with me, then nobody else had the right to be harsh on me either.

One incident in 7th grade made me despise her even more. My friends Priya and Maya were there too. Maya's mother had come to pick us up from school. Priya and I were coming out of choir while Maya was already in the car. Maya's mother started fussing about how slow we were walking. I whispered a few words to Priya that Maya's mother wouldn't have liked. At least, I thought I had whispered. After sitting in her car, I realized she had heard me. The entire way home, she reprimanded me. Luckily, our house was only 5 minutes away. Still, those 5 minutes felt like an eternity.

Of course, when we reached home, she told you everything. I don't even know what she said to you. She probably made me seem like more of a villain than I was. You didn't yell at me, but just gave me a glare. I received the silent treatment from you for the rest of day, perhaps you were disappointed in me. You didn't expect me to talk badly behind someone else's back, especially if the person is older than me. Finally, in the evening I came and apologized to you. You forgave me with a smile and made me understand what I did was wrong. Of course, I was younger then so, I still didn't think I was wrong. But, just to make you happy, I agreed with you. I was a little scared that you would tell my dad about my wrongdoing when he came home from work, as you know how enraged he would be. But, for my sake, you didn't tell him.

I know now that you meant well for me, but I still wish you would have taken my side and supported me. Maybe, that would have been spoiling me. I would've felt better if you had told me that I wasn't wrong and I should be more careful the next time I wanted to talk that way about someone. Even you had issues with Maya's mom and didn't like her much, but I was still too young to understand. I know you will always support me and be there for me. Whatever you did was for my betterment and I respect that about you.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

मी डावकत होती शाळेत माला जबरदस्ती choir ला जाव लागायच। माया ची आई माला जबरदस्ती जाव लावायची, माला जायला डावडायच पण जबरदस्ती नाही। ती माझ्या सोबत खुप कठोर आशायची, तुझ्याकडेन जास्त। माला नेहमी वाटायच की तू जास्त कठोर नाही आहे तर कोणी दुसऱ्याना पण काई ठरज नाही।

एकदा वक्तू मध्ये तर माला खुप राग आला होता तीच्या शी। माझे मैत्रीजी, प्रिया आणी माया पण होते। माया ची आई आमाला ~~डावडाय~~ डावडाय घ्यायला आली होती, प्रिया आणी मी choir मधून बाहेर येत होते आणी माया तीच्या गाडीत बसलेली होती। तेवांच माया ची आई मणाय लागली की आमी खुप हाळू चालत आहो। मी प्रिया ला हाळू शोडे शब्द मणले जे माया च्या आई ला नाही डावडणार, माला वाटलः हाळू होत पण माया च्या आई नी संगळः डाडकल। माला घरी सोडे परंत इतकः डाडकौल। नशीबानी आफत घर माझ्या शाळे ऊ जास्त लाग्ब नोंत च।

जेवां घरी पांचलो तीनी तुला संगळः सांगील्ल। माला माहीती नाही तीनी तुला जक्की काण सांगील्ल। तू माला आरडली माही, काई मणली पण नाही। दीक्स शर मुस्त रागात बसिल्ल। तुला कधी वाटलः नोंत की मी आसः काई करणार। मी संध्याकळी पुन तुझ्याशी माफी मागील्ली। तू खुशीनी माला माफ केलः आणी

सांगीत की भी जे केल: ते ठीक नोंत । मी
तर तेवां धोटी होते तर माला नाही वाटल की मी
चुक केली आहे पण नुझ्या सठी मी नुझ्या झाडकल
माला तर शीती वाटत होती की नु बाबा
ला सांगशील पण नु नाही सांगील, माझ्या
सठी ।

माला आता माहीती आहे की नु माझ:
चांगलच वीचार करत होती पण तरी माझी
तेवां इच्छा होती की नु माझी बाजू घेतली आस्ती।
माला बर: वाटली आस्त की नु सांगील आस्त
की मी बरोबर आहे आणि पुढच्या वेळस
माला आस काई बालाच आहे तर माला शांत:
राहील पाहीजे । पण, माला माहीती आहे की
नु नेहमी माझ्या सोबत आहे । माला माहीती
आहे की नुला पण माया ची आई नाही आवडायची
पण ते सगळ: संझायला मी जाणुन छोटी होती ।
नु जे काई केल: माझ्या चांगले सठी केल:

काळजी घे,
मी

Everyone rushed out of the church as soon as we were dismissed by our teacher, but not me. I was exhausted from singing for so long and the entire day was draining. An hour of Choir was too much for anyone. As the crowd thinned out, I started walking towards my classroom to grab my school bags with my friend, Priya. The parking lot was on the way where I could see my other friend, Maya. I could see Maya's mom already there waiting for us as she was here to pick up all of us. Maya had already put her bags in her mother's car. As Priya and I were walking to our classrooms, slowly, might I add, Maya's mother yelled at us, "Would you girls hurry up? I'm getting late."

I internally rolled my eyes. She was a family friend, but I never liked her.

"It's not our fault Mrs. Chalmers let us out late. Why is Maya's mother throwing such a fit? Can't she wait a little?" I told Priya quietly. She just shrugged and continued walking.

We both went to grab our bags. Even though I didn't like Maya's mother, she scared me, so I quickly grabbed my bags and rushed to the car. Priya followed me with her bags and sat in the back of the car with Maya while I sat in the front. Maya's mother started driving while Maya and Priya started conversing with each other. They tried to include me, but I was too tired to respond.

"What were you saying to Priya earlier?" That sudden question made me turn to Maya's Mother. She glanced at me, so I knew the question was directed to me.

"I just told her how Mrs. Chalmers let us out late," I said as confidently as I could, hoping she couldn't hear my fast heartbeat because I was panicking. Did she hear what I said about her?

"Is that all you said?" she asked me as her voice became a little hostile.

"Yes, that's all I said," I stuck to what I said.

"Stop lying! I heard what you said," She raised her voice. I was scared and terrified of what was going to happen next.

"You were talking about me. I'm throwing a fit? And I can't wait? I can't believe you would talk like that. Is that how you speak about people who are older than you?"

I tried to deny it, but it didn't make any difference. She just kept going on and on. I figured, the smart thing to do was to stay quiet. I looked ahead without saying anything more, just hoping we would reach home faster this one time.

"Your mother is going to hear about this from me. I never thought you would do something like this."

I looked out the window trying hard not to cry. When Mom finds out about this, she is going to yell at me or punish me or maybe both.

I got out as soon as she stopped the car. I didn't even need a minute to get my things and go inside my house. I saw Mom approaching the car and talking to Maya's mother.

"I can't believe what she said..."

That's all I heard before I rushed inside. I dumped my bags near the door and sat down on the couch. I finally let out my tears.

Mom came in the house and I was expecting the worst from her. However, she didn't yell at me nor look angry instead she sat down on one of the couches and calmly asked me.

"What happened?" I wiped some of my tears before speaking.

"Priya and I were going to our classrooms to grab our bags. Maya's mom saw us and told us to hurry up. So, I complained to Priya about Maya's mom getting angry and she heard it all."

I sniffed a little and heard something I hadn't expected at all.

"You should have been quieter while talking to Priya."

"I thought I was being quiet, but she heard me anyway." Mom sighed.

"Did she yell at you?" I calmed myself and replied.

"Yes." Mom seemed a little angry when she heard me.

"Well, you know how she is. If you ever want to say anything next time, be quieter." I nodded.

She smiled and came to me for a hug. "Don't worry, one day we are going to leave this place and we won't ever have to talk to her again."

"Now smile," She said as I giggled.

With the tears in my eyes, I felt content and joy. Mom understood me and trusted me more than other people. Because of that, I felt closer to her. I felt like I could tell her anything. I knew she would always hear my side of the story before making an opinion.

She was my best friend.

Food Is Important

Dear Mom,

"Are you eating well?" It's the question my dad asks every time he calls me and if you were here, you would ask me that too. I think you would be disappointed to know that I have not been eating healthy. I spend most of my time doing my job so, I don't have time to eat well every day. However, I tell my dad that I eat well just so he doesn't worry about me.

I am smiling now as I think of ways to not worry my dad but there was a time when I would get annoyed over the smallest things he did or said. I think I was 12 or 13 years old when dad and I had a big argument. To be honest, I don't even remember what the argument was about, but I remember how I felt afterwards.

It was almost dinner time. Dad and I were in the living room watching TV while you were in the kitchen finishing up with dinner. Dad was annoyed with something I did, maybe it was my schoolwork or that I spent a lot of time on my phone. He started yelling at me but this time I didn't feel like I did anything wrong. I yelled back at him which resulted in him yelling back at me, this went on for a while until I ran to my bedroom in tears. I fell on my bed crying for a while until you came up to call me for dinner.

I was too upset to eat anything, so I refused but you consoled me and calmed me down. You didn't say anything in defense of my dad, nor did you say that it was my fault. You just said to come downstairs and eat as I shouldn't starve because of my mood. After a while, I came downstairs. I didn't say anything to my dad, nor did he say anything to me. I ate quietly and went back to my room.

I was happy to see that you cared about me. I wish that dad would have come up to call me for dinner or at least say something to me. Because of the fight with dad, you took care of me. The fight wasn't a pleasant memory however, you coming to console and comfort me was a soothing feeling.

I hope you are looking after yourself, just like you looked after me.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

"तुझ खाण-पीण नीट आहे न?" हे प्रश्न बाबा नेहमीं माला विचारतात आणि तू आस्ली आस्ली तर तू पण विचारल आस्त। तुला आइकून चांगल नाही वाटनार पण मी नीट नाही खात। माला रोज नीट खायला वेळच नाही मीळत। पण मी बाबा ला सांगते की मी नीट खाल्ला, तेन्नी चिंता नाही करु मणुन।

आता मी बाबा ना त्रास नाही देत पण आधी माला तेंच्या वर खुप चीड-चीड पायच। मी बारा का तेरा वरशा चीं होते, तेंवा बाबा च आणी माझ खुप मोठु आंण झाल होता। कष्या मुळे झाल, ते आवत नाही पण माला खुप व्हाइट वाटल होत।

रात्री जेवणाचेच्या आधी, बाबा आणी मी T.V. बघत होतो आणी तू स्वपाक करत होती। मी काइतरी केल होता जे तेन्ना माझ्या वर राग आला। बाबा माला ओरडायलावळे मग मी पण ओरडली, आस बराच वेळ चाल्ल। मग मी रडता-रडता माझ्या खोलीत गेली। मी बराच वेळ रडत होते मग तू आली माला बोल्वायला।

माला काइ पण खायच नोंत मणुन मी नाही मणल। तू माला समझौला की खाणे वर कंपुसी नाही कराइची। थोडे वेळत, मी खली आले। मी बाबा ना काइ नाही मणल आणी तेन्नी पण माला काइ नाही मणल। मी चुप-चाप खाउन माझ्या खोलीत गेले।

मामा खुप चांगला वाटल की तुला माझ्या
 खायची गोडी काळजी आहे पण बाबा मामा
 बोलवायला आले आस्त तर मामा आजून
 चांगल वाटल आस्ता । त्या भांडण मुळे
 तु माझी काळजी घेली । ते भांडण चांगली
 आवण नोती पण तु माझी काळजी
 घायला आली, ते मामा खुप चांगला वाटला
 तु पण तशीच काळजी घे जशी तु माझी
 काळजी घेली ।

काळजी घे,
 मी

I giggled at my phone while sprawled across the couch. Just then, the doorbell rang. My dad had come home from work. He saw me on my phone and let out a disappointing sigh before going to his room to change.

Soon, my dad came downstairs and sat on the opposite couch. He turned on the TV while giving me the same disappointing look.

"Can you please get me water from the kitchen?" he asked me.

"Yes. In a minute," I said while being completely engrossed on my phone. 5 minutes had passed but I didn't get up from my seat.

"What did I tell you? Go, get me water," My dad said in an authoritative voice.

"Yes. Just one minute," I whined as I watched the video on my phone.

"Can't you ever listen to me?"

"I'm not saying no. I'm just saying in a while."

"But I'm saying NOW! GO!" he yelled at me.

I got up to go the kitchen but not before giving him a hard glare. Mom saw me come in and thought best not to say anything. She took a glass from the closet and started filling it with water. In the meantime, I could hear my dad complaining about how lazy I am and how I am always on my phone. Mom gave me the glass of water and showed me the face that read 'be quiet'.

I took the glass of water outside and stood near him with the glass still in my hand. Mom had come out of the kitchen to watch what was happening. I couldn't stay quiet.

"I'm not lazy and I'm not always on my phone," I told my dad.

"I always see you on the phone. What else do you do besides just sit around the house?"

"Just because you always see me on my phone doesn't mean I don't do anything else."

"Go to your room!" he yelled at me while pointing at the stairs.

"Fine," I said while keeping the glass on the dining table, away from my dad.

Mom tried to stop me as I sprinted back to my room and slammed the door. I got into my bed and covered myself with my favorite pink blanket and started sobbing hard.

Soon after, I heard someone come into my room. I peeked from my blanket and saw my dad. I immediately covered myself again. He came and sat down on my bed. I didn't want to talk to my dad nor hear any of his criticism.

"Your mom said dinner is ready," he said.

"I don't want to eat anything," I said while sniffing.

"You shouldn't skip meals just because you're angry," he said.

"I'm not hungry," I said wanting him to go away.

"You can eat your food and still be angry," he said and got up from my bed. "Come on," he said urging me to get up as I peeked out of my blanket.

My dad walked towards the door and turned the lights on expecting me to follow. I had stopped crying at this point and was contemplating whether or not I should go downstairs.

"Come on! Food is important," he said while I sighed and got out of my bed.

Anyone Can Be A Student

Dear Mom,

I was looking at new job postings online as I'm thinking of applying to one. That reminded me of the time you were thinking of applying to one. You didn't know where to start or what to do. Doing everything on the internet had become the new trend which you were still unfamiliar with. Dad was helping you out by setting up your email ID on his laptop. Even though I was watching TV, I was more interested in how dad was teaching you the entire process of an email.

Dad opened the website for the email and was showing you what it is and how it works. I understood everything dad was explaining to you as I have my own email ID. After giving you the introduction tour of the email, dad gave you his laptop and left the room. Before leaving, he told me to help you if you encountered a problem, but only help. He didn't want me to do it for you as he wanted you to learn by doing.

I came and sat down next to you, I wanted to see how you were doing it. It was fascinating watching you handle the laptop and trying to figure everything out. You had never used a laptop before, so everything was new to you. You asked me whenever you came across a problem and I helped you gladly.

When you had a problem, I couldn't solve, I took the laptop in my hands trying to figure it out. Just then, Dad entered the room and saw the laptop in my hands. He yelled at me thinking I was doing it for you. I replied that I was just helping you out, but dad was still angry at me. You quickly took the laptop from my hands while telling dad that I was just helping you to calm him down. It did the trick because he didn't yell at me any longer.

I just sat there next to you with a frown on my face thinking how my dad is bothered by everything I do. You eventually did it and created your email ID.

I wish I were the one who taught you how to create an email ID. The feeling of teaching you something would be fulfilling. You have taught me so much, from my studies to my life. I have come to you regarding all my problems, and you have solved each and every one of them. I just wanted to return the favor by helping you out. I would sleep better at night knowing I gave you some knowledge too.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

मी नविन नौकी चे हस्त बगत होते। मी विचार करत आहे, एका ला Apply करायला। तेवां माला जाठकल जेवां तु पण विचार करत होती कळ चा। तुला काई माहीती नौता की कुठून सुरुआत कराइची। तेवां तर सगळे काम इंटरनेट वर हवाएचे। मग बाबा तुझी मदत करत होते तेच्या Laptop वर। मी T.V. बगत होते पण माझा सगळ लक्ष तुमच्या वर होता।

बाबा मी तुला हाखत होते कि E-mail काय जास्त आणो ते कस वापरायचा। माला तर सगळ कळल: कि बाबा तुला काय सांगत होते। तुला सगळ समझउन बाबा दुसरे खोलीत गेले आणी तुझ्या हातात Laptop ठेवला। जायच्या आधी माला सांगील्ल तुझी मदत करायला पण नुस्त मदत। तू स्वताकून शिकू, जास वाटत होता तेन्ना।

मी तुझ्या बाजूला युन बस्ली आणी बगत होते की तु काय करत आहे। तुला Laptop वापरता बघून माला खुप मज्जा येत होती। तू पहील कधी Laptop वपरला नौता मणुन तुझ्या सठी सगळ नविन होता। तू विचारला तर मी तुझी मदत केली।

जेवां मी तुझी मदत नाही करू शकले, मी Laptop माझ्या हातात घेतला आणी तेवांच बाबा खोलीत आले, तेन्ना माझ्या हातात Laptop बघील्ल। तेन्ना वाटला मी तुझ्या सठी करत होते आणी

तेन्नी माझ्या वर ओरडला पण मी मणाले की
मी तुझी मदत करत होते। तेन्ना नाही पटलः
तर तू पटकन माझ्या हातात उन जपण घेतला
आणी मणाला की मी नुस्त मदत करत होते।
तेन्नी तुझा आडकुन घेतला आणी माझ्या वर
आजुन राग नाही काडला।

माला तर बाबा वर चीड येत होती की
तेन्ना नेहमी माझ्या वर राग येतो। तू शेवटी
तुझा Email बनोला।

माझी इच्छा होती की मी तुला शिकोणार।
तुला काई शिकवायला माला खुप छान वाटला
आस्त। तू माला खुप काई शिकोला आहे आणी
माझे सगळे समस्या सोडोले आहे। मणुन माला
पण तुझ्या सठी तसः करायचा होता। मी तुला
काई तरी नकिन शिकोला आहे, हे विचार करुन
माला रात्री चांगली झोप येइल।

काळजी घे,
मी

One evening, I was sitting on the couch watching television while Mom was in the kitchen cooking dinner. I was on my dad's laptop, working on some presentation for school simultaneously. My dad had gone to one of his friends' house for dinner so, it was just mom and me. Mom called me from the kitchen to let me know dinner was ready. I kept the laptop aside and went to the kitchen to grab a plate. I went out to the couch and sat down. Mom came out too with a plate in her hands and sat on the opposite couch. We were watching the television while eating. After a while, her eyes fell on the laptop next to me.

"Were you doing work on the laptop?" she asked with a curiosity.

"Yes. It was for school," I replied.

"Were you doing work on the internet?" she asked me.

"Umm... no, I was working on a PowerPoint," I replied.

"Do you know how to work on the internet? It's become so popular now, what's that new messaging service? Email? Everyone has those today," she said.

"Yes. It has become more of a need because everyone uses it. I also have an email," I replied back.

"Will you show me how to create one?" she asked me with an interest.

"Sure," I nodded as I replied.

After finishing dinner, Mom came and sat down next to me as I took the laptop in my hands. I opened the browser and explained everything about an email. I showed her my email and the features it had. After a while, I opened the page to create an account and gave her the laptop.

Mom started to create an account for herself. It was quite self-explanatory but since Mom had never used a laptop before, it was quite new for her.

Watching Mom use a laptop was a sight I had never seen before. It was a delight to see her trying to learn something. I was keen to help her with this. For once, I was the teacher, and she was the student.

Just watching her trying to get the hang of it put a small smile on my face.

"I thought this was complicated but, it's actually quite easy to use," she smiled at me.

"Yup. Do you want to try and send an email to me? I will reply back," I said.

"Sure," she replied.

I thought she would ask me how to do it, but she didn't. She searched for the icon to create an email, entered my email address, and typed in a simple 'hi'.

"Done. I sent you an email," she said. "Check if you got it."

She gave me the laptop and I logged into my email.

"Yup. Here it is," I said as I pointed to the laptop screen. She smiled after seeing that. Just for the sake of replying back, I typed in a 'hi' too. I even showed her the process of replying to someone's email as I was doing it.

I gave the laptop back to her.

"Now log in to yours and see if you got my email," I said.

She logged into her email and there it was. She grinned widely as she celebrated her achievement on how to send and receive emails. After that, she wanted to add email IDs to her contact list, so I gave her email IDs of the people we knew mutually.

There was a fulfillment inside of me. I had taught something to someone. Even if it wasn't something big, I had passed knowledge to someone else.

I never thought I would teach Mom something.

I guess, anyone can be a student.

SWIM-A-THON

Dear Mom,

I was just watching a video of me participating in an annual swimming charity event when I was in 7th grade. It was called Swim-A-Thon and was mandatory for all students in grade 1-7. Dad and you had come to see me swim. I always enjoyed the yearly event as it was for a good cause.

The evening started with the students of grade 1-3 swimming. As they were still young, older students were there to help them swim. There were students helping them swim in the pool, and students standing outside the pool in case of an emergency. I wished to be one of the students helping the younger ones swim in the pool as it looked like so much fun. But since I couldn't swim well myself, I wasn't able to help others.

Dad and you hadn't come yet as there was still time before it was my turn to swim. I needed to be there early as I was a student. I was just sitting and watching other kids swim but I wasn't feeling bored because the energy around me was amazing. There were so many students and teachers around and there was music playing through the speakers.

Soon enough, I saw dad and you walk in. You saw me and waved at me as I was sitting far away. You took your place on the bleachers opposite to me. Soon, it was time for students of the 7th grade to swim, so I got up and got ready near the pool. As soon as I heard the bell, I jumped in.

You were recording a video of me while dad was yelling out words of encouragement or so he thought. He kept saying "You can do better" and "You can swim faster". However, that wasn't what I wanted to hear. In the 10 minutes I swam, he kept repeating that. Even when I stopped to rest for a while, he kept saying "You shouldn't stop". There is even a

moment in the video when I became irritated and yelled out "Okay!" just to make him stop talking. However, that just made him a little annoyed. Then you said, "You are doing amazing" and that encouraged me to do better. Just knowing you appreciated my hard work was a reward for me.

I wish my dad felt the same too. I wished he would have seen the hard work I was doing rather than the hard work I could have done. Because of those comments from dad, you yelled out cheers of encouragement. I realized then, you would always know what I want to hear and when I want to hear it.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

मी एक video बगत होते जेचान मी पोहत होते।
ते माझ्या शाळेत दर वरशी वायचा। ते SWIM-A-THON
होता आणि 1st-7th मधले सगळे विद्यार्थी ना
कराव लागायचा। बाबा आणि तु माला पोहतान्ना
बगायला आले होते। माला SWIM-A-THON मध्ये
खुप मज्जा पाडची। सगळे मध्ये क्योडी उजा
डसाडची।

पहीले 1st इव चे विद्यार्थी पोहणार होते।
ते आजुन छोटे होते मणुन तेच्या पैशा मोठे
विद्यार्थी होते मदत करायला। माझी पण
इच्छा होती मदत कराडची पण माला नीट पोहता
नाता येत।

बाबा आणि तु आजुन आले नोंते कारण
माझ्या पोहणान आजुन वेळ होता। माला
लौकर जायचा होता कारण मी विद्यार्थी होती।
मी Bleachers वर बसली होती माझ्या मैत्रीणी
सोबत। आमी दुसरेन्ना पोहतांना बगत होता। माला
कंटाल नोंता येत। सगळेन्ना काम करताना
बगुन खुप चांगला वाटत होता।

शोझ्या वेळत तु आणि बाबा आले। तुम्ही
माला बंगील्ल आणि हात दाखोला इ। तुम्ही
दुसरे Bleachers वर बसले। लौकरच माझी बारी
आली। मी उठुन फूल च्या जवळ तयार आली।
अग मी डेल आइकली आणि दुपकी लौली।

तु माझा video बनवत होती आणि बाबा
जोरित बोलत होते। तेन्ना वाटला की माला Encourage

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करत होते। ते मणत होते 'मी आप्णुन चांगला करू शकते' पण माला आइकामचा होता की 'मी चांगला करती आहे'। पुरणा दाहा मिन. तेन्नी तेच सांगिल्ला की मी आप्णुन चांगला करू शकते। मी भोड्या वेळ आराम कराइला शकबली तरी मणाले 'शाम्बु नको'। Video मध्ये तर एकदा मी चिडले पण मग ते माझ्या वर चीडले। मग तू मणाली 'तू खुप छान करती आहे' आणि ते आइकून मी आप्णुन पटकन पोहाय लागली। तू माझी मेहनत बगील्ली आणि माझ्या सठी तेच छान होता।

बाबा ना पण तसा वाटला आस्ता तर माला आप्णुन छान वाटला आस्ता। तूला नेहमी महीती आस्ता की माला काम आइकामचा आहे।

काळजी घे,
मी

Every year my school held a charity event where all the students from grade 1-7 swam as many laps as they could in 10 minutes. The students from the 7th grade always helped the younger students as many of them didn't know how to swim. This year, I was in the 7th grade so, I gained the opportunity to help the younger kids.

I jumped in the water and shivered a little because of the cold water. I waited for the children to come in. I could see many of my classmates in the swimming pool waiting for the children, just like me. Soon enough, the children came in the water with their kickboards and other safety equipment. I didn't really know much about the little girl I was helping as she was very shy and quiet. I tried to warm up to her, but she didn't say anything.

Everyone was on the starting line waiting for the sound of the bell. As soon as the bell rang, the kids started flapping their legs as fast as possible. I was pulling the girl's kickboard as she moved her legs. I kept talking to her and encouraging her in the hopes that she would talk back. At times, I even stopped to make sure she wasn't too tired. She barely spoke two words to me in the 10 minutes but, I had fun. It was a delight to help someone else.

As the evening went by, all the students swam and finally it was my turn. The grade 7s were the most senior, so we had to wait until all the students had had their chance. When it was my turn, the sky had become dark, and the weather was colder. It felt strange to be at school in the night.

I was excited and nervous as I got ready to jump in. I could swim but not as well as my peers. I knew I would swim the least number of laps. I sighed and let go of my fears. I just focused on doing my best and having fun.

I could see my parents sitting on the empty bleachers in front of me. As it was dark, most of the parents and students had left. Mom took out a camera from her purse and pointed it to me. I assumed she was shooting a video.

I put my swimming goggles on and waved to Mom while I waited. As I heard the bell, I jumped in along with my peers. I swam as fast as I could towards my parents and back. I couldn't see my parents while I was swimming, but I could hear them cheering for me.

"You're doing so well!" Mom said loudly.

"Good job! Keep going," my dad cheered as he clapped.

And those kept going on for 10 minutes. Whenever I came near my parents, they cheered for me and encouraged me to go on. Mom shot my video for 10 minutes as I could see the camera in her hands the entire time I was swimming.

I took many breaks as swimming for a straight 10 minutes wasn't feasible for me. However, hearing those words of encouragement from my parents helped me swim a lot more than I thought.

The bell rang again indicating that our time was up. I stopped and took a deep breath, I didn't even realize how much I needed that. I got out of the swimming pool and saw my parents clapping. I waved to them and quickly went to the changing room.

After I came out, my parents were waiting for me. Both of them hugged me tightly and commended me.

"You were amazing!" Mom said.

"Yes. You did really good," my dad said.

I thanked them but, in my mind, I knew I had done very little compared to my classmates. However, it felt nice to hear that my work had been appreciated. We retreated to the car as my parents started talking. They seemed more excited than me about this event. As

they had spent their schooling years in India, they didn't have these opportunities there. They were just happy for me as I have gotten a chance of living in a foreign country where I have access to new experiences and prospects.

The Wedding

Dear Mom,

I wonder how your sister is doing. I'm sure she misses you too. I haven't talked to her in several years, so I don't know where she is nor what she does. I guess we just lost touch after you left. I know if you were here, I would still be in touch with her. You always taught me the value of family and how important it is to be connected with family.

I still remember the time I wanted to attend her wedding, but I couldn't because of my school. Dad, you, and I were in India for a holiday during my winter break. We spent the entire time touring around with our family and friends. My aunt was getting married in January and we were supposed to go back to South Africa before her wedding. My school would be starting before the wedding and neither Dad nor you wanted me to skip out on my orientation. However, others in the family convinced us to stay. You and dad thought it was alright for me to miss a couple days of school. Dad even emailed my school headmaster about my absence and tried to postpone our tickets for a couple of days.

But we couldn't get a ticket for the date we wanted. The closest date was a month away and that was just too long for me to miss out on school. So, my dad postponed your ticket while he and I returned to South Africa. I missed you quite a lot. You would send us pictures of your fun times with the family, and I would just feel envious. Many of our relatives came from abroad to attend the wedding. So, I was disappointed on missing the chance to meet them. All my cousins were there enjoying themselves while I was attending school. I felt left out.

I understood why I had to return. I wouldn't have wanted to miss a month of school. However, I wish that I would have gotten a chance to attend the wedding. It would have been a delight to see an Indian wedding and meet all of our relatives.

Even though I wasn't able to be there, I'm glad you got the chance to attend your sister's wedding and make memories with your family before you left.

Take care!

Love,

Me

आई,

मि विचार करत होते की माडशी कशी आसेल । तीला पण तुझी आठवण येत आसेल । मि तर तीच्या शी खुप वरशा पासुन भेटलेच नाही । माला नाही माहीती ती कुठे आहे आणि काय करते । तु दुशे आस्ली आस्तें तर आमी दोंघ आजुन ही बोलत आस्तो । तु नेहमी माला सांगील्ला आहे की घर चें लोकां सोबत जुडून राहायचा ।

माला आजुन ही आठवता जेवां माला माडशी च्या लठ्ठनात जायचः होता पण माड्या शाळे मुळे नाही आम्बु शकले । बाबा, तु आणि मी सुद्दी साठी भारतान आलो होतो । आपण क्योडी मज्जा केली सगळे मैत्रीणी सोबत । माडशी च लग्न Jan. मधे होणार होता पण आपण तेच्या आधीच South Africa ला वापस जाणार होतो कारण माडशी शाळा सुरू होणार होती । पण घर च्या लोकांनी आपल्याला आम्बडन घेतलाः । बाबा नी तीकीट पण पुढे ठकलणा चा प्रयतना केला ।

पण तीकीट नाही मीळाला, एक महीना नंतर चा मीळाला । मग बाबा नी तुझा पुढे केला आणि आमी दोघा वापस गेलो । तीकडे गेलें नंतर, माला तुझी खुप आठवण आली । तु नेहमी तुझे आणि घरच्यां चें फोन पाठवायची । माला ने बेगुन खुप व्हाईट वाटायचा । आपले क्योडे नातेवाईक खुप वरशा नी आले पण माला कोणाला भेटायला नाही मीळाला ।

माता माहीती होता की माझा वापस येणः खुप
जरुरी आहे पण माता माझी च लठन बग्याचा
होता । सगळे नानेवईकां ना भेटला आस्ता आणि
माहाराष्ट्रीअन लठन पण बगीला आस्ता ।

मी तीशे नाही राहु शकले पण कमीत कमी
तु गहीली आणि तुझ्या घरच्या सोबत आणुन
आठवणी बनोले ।

काळजी घे,
मी

"Why don't you postpone your ticket?" my grandmother asked Mom.

My happiness level shot up after hearing those words from my grandmother. Staying in India to attend the wedding seemed so exciting. But Mom didn't show the same level of enthusiasm as me. She was contemplating it because if we were to postpone our tickets, I would miss my 8th grade orientation and a couple days of school. As it was a new school year for me, she didn't want me to miss anything important.

"Hmm, I don't know about that," Mom said after thinking a little.

"You can try. It's your sister's wedding, you should be there," my grandmother insisted. Mom did seem to be taking it under consideration.

"Please mom, we'll have so much fun," I tried to convince her as well.

It was my aunt's wedding, and I was quite disappointed earlier that I wouldn't be able to attend it. I had never been to an Indian wedding and I wanted to experience that. I was already thinking of what I would wear to the wedding and how much fun I would have with all my cousins and relatives.

"Alright." I was about to start celebrating until Mom said, "But let's ask your dad about it." I sighed and hoped that my dad would agree to it. He wouldn't like that I would miss school especially when I would be starting my first year of high school.

Later that night, Mom talked to my dad about my aunt's wedding.

"So, my mom is insisting we stay for the wedding," Mom started talking as my dad was busy doing some work on the laptop.

"Your sister's wedding?" my dad asked when he looked up from the laptop.

"Yes. Could we postpone our tickets?" she asked him.

"When is the wedding?" my dad asked.

"22nd Jan," I replied.

"Hmm... you would miss a couple days of school," he said.

"I know. But a couple days would be fine. A family event is important too," I said trying to sound as convincing as possible.

"Your studies shouldn't suffer even for a family event," he said.

"It will be fine. I will catch up with all my studies after we go there," I said trying to change his mind.

"Let's stay. She really wants to attend the wedding. It will just be a couple of days. She will catch up," Mom insisted while I vigorously nodded my head and that seemed to have done something as my dad was thinking about it.

"Okay. Let me see if I can postpone the tickets," he said.

As he was already on his laptop, he checked right away if we could postpone our flight. Luckily, he found available flights for a week later than our original date.

"We will be leaving on 25th Jan. You will miss 5 days of school," he said to me as I nodded with a huge grin.

As this plan was sudden, Mom and I didn't have any festive clothes for the wedding. The next day, both of us, along with my aunt went to the store. My aunt was simply there to help us find something nice. When I entered store, I saw so many people. It was huge and there were so many different types of clothes. It seemed very colorful and lively. We sat on a couple of chairs and a salesman came towards us to show us some clothes. We were buying for Mom first and then me. Mom and my aunt spent a lot of time selecting clothes. So, when it was my turn, I was too exhausted to even look at clothes. Mom helped me select something as she knew what would look good on me. We spent almost 3 hours in that store. I didn't do anything except sit and look at clothes but, I was so tired. On our

way back home, Mom and my aunt still looked fresh and seemed like they could do more work. How do they do that?

As the date for the wedding came closer, more relatives came, and the house seemed to be getting crowded. The house was immensely decorated. There were fairy lights with red- and yellow-colored marigolds hanging all over the exterior of the house. The cacophony of people could be heard at all times. I even met my cousins whom I hadn't seen in years.

The wedding day came, and Mom was running around doing everything necessary. Mom wasn't letting anyone else do anything. I was surprised to see her do so much without even taking a break. My aunt and I were sitting on the couch while she was telling me things about Mom.

"She will get tired during the wedding," I told my aunt.

"No, she will still be there ready to do anything else. This behavior is normal for her. From childhood, she has helped everyone in everything. She doesn't want anyone else to work. She has a helping nature," she said.

I didn't know that about Mom, and it was nice to know something about her.

We reached the venue and started getting ready. I decided to wear a pink *Ghagra* while all the other ladies were wearing *Sarees*. I didn't even see Mom as she was too busy doing everything. Soon, my aunt was ready, and everyone went outside. There was pavilion in the middle of the garden, it was heavily decorated with flowers and colorful drapes. It was at a higher level so that everyone could see them. There was a small fire on the middle of the floor with many other items on the side I didn't know about. There were lots of people around the pavilion, waiting for the bride. I went in the audience as I wanted to see the wedding in its entirety. The bride and the groom sat on the carpeted floor in front of the fire while the priest started chanting the prayers. There were many rituals they had to do.

I didn't even know what they were or what was their significance. It was quite long however, Mom was at my aunt's beck and call for the entire wedding. I knew the wedding was almost ending when the bride and the groom got up. They put the flower garlands in each other's necks and started taking 7 rounds around the fire. Everyone on the chairs got up and started throwing rice on them. I could see Mom smiling at them while my grandparents had tears in their eyes. Soon the wedding was over, and the bride and groom touched my grandparent's feet for their blessings. Mom gave my aunt a tight hug. Watching that exchange happening between the family made me a little emotional.

After a while, I was sitting with Mom on the side watching all the people going on the pavilion to congratulate the couple.

"So, did you have fun?" Mom asked me.

"Yes. I had a lot of fun," I replied with a smile and let out a satisfying sigh. I looked over to Mom and she still didn't seem to be tired. "You have been doing everything for the past couple of days. Aren't you tired?" I asked her.

"No. I like helping people. I feel happy when I know someone else is smiling because of me." I smiled at her answer.

"Now come on. Let's eat lunch," Mom said. Both of us got up from our chairs and went to eat.

Epilogue

Dear Mom,

I can't even begin to express how hard my life had been right after you left. All the things I found joy in had become boring. I spent all my time in front of the computer playing games and reading stories. I didn't realize it then, but I was depressed. A huge part of my life had changed, and I didn't know how to deal with that. The emotions I felt were completely new and unknown. My dad, my aunt, and other relatives would constantly try to interact with me thinking I needed someone. But I just wanted to be left alone.

It took me a while to comprehend what had happened. After a couple years, I realized that you were no longer with me and never will be. I feel like I have been on a rollercoaster of emotions till now. It has been hard for me to experience it, much harder for me to put into words. As I was just a teenager when you left, my emotions were already haywire and, your passing just amplified it.

Even though you were a huge part of my life, I feel like I barely knew you. I know that children don't know much about their parents, but I felt angry and enraged at myself for not knowing you. I learnt many things about you from your mother, cousins, and friends. Somehow, I felt envious of everyone for being closer to you. Everyone admired and talked about you a lot. But, I didn't like talking about you a bit. Other than feeling envious, I felt sad. Just thinking about you or listening to someone else talk about you brought tears to my eyes. Your mother would talk about all her joyful memories with you. However, I felt like my joyful memories with you had become sad. It was painful to talk about it because the memories reminded me of your death.

Gradually, as time passed, those negative feelings vanished. When I became older, I got the chance to know you as a person, rather than a daughter. You hold a special place in everyone's hearts. Even today, my grandmother, my dad, or anyone else always have a smile on their faces when they talk about you. Looking at everyone, that's how I want to remember you. Even though you aren't here, I want there to be a smile on my face thinking that you were a part of my life. I don't want all my memories with you to become sad. I want to look back upon them and smile or laugh.

Writing all these letters has been a form of closure for me. Thinking about these memories with you has been joyful process. I have lived through those memories once again. It would delight you to know that this has been the first time I have thought of the happy memories as just memories. I haven't cried nor felt any pain. I just feel happy to have had experiences and moments with you. I feel grateful to have known you.

Finally, I feel like I can breathe.

I don't feel any grief.

Love,

Me

POETICS STATEMENT

My thesis is a memoir about my mother. I was only 14 years old when my mother passed away. At the time I felt that I didn't know much about her. I learned many things about her after her death which made me question whether I knew her at all. During the 14 years she was in my life, she was my best friend. She was the one person who knew everything about me. I could tell her anything without giving it a second thought because I knew she wouldn't judge or mock me. In the time that she was alive, she did a lot for me while I feel that I did not do as much for her. This memoir is written to honor or memorialize her.

My thesis explores the dynamics of grief felt by a daughter for her deceased mother. After my mother died, I have only the memories left. While I enjoyed the times I had with her, I can't help but imagine different versions of the memories. I started by writing letters addressed to my mom in my diary. In those letters, I describe the actual memory along with some nuances of what I might wish to be different.

Along with the letters to my mother, my thesis includes a narrative version of the same memory so that readers can get a better idea of what I am imagining. The memories range from childhood to my middle school years. In the first memory, I'm 6 years old and in the last memory, I'm 13 years old.

The concept of writing two different versions of the same memory came to me during the process of revision. While writing a memory and re-visiting it, I realized that every time I remembered a memory, a new detail came to mind. I thought of something I hadn't before so, I

wrote an imaginary version. I wrote the memory how I wanted to remember it rather than how it was. As one reads through those memories, they will come to realize that the changes I made to the memory aren't great or exceptional. The changes are quite simple and ordinary as they are imagined from the mind of a young girl. These are fantasies I had when I was that particular age in the memory. One example would be the day that I missed my school bus. After being unable to catch the school bus, my mom and I spent the day with my friend's mom. However, I always had the fantasy of having an unplanned shopping trip with my mom on that day. Wanting a shopping trip isn't anything special, however, when I was younger that activity was extraordinary to me. The simple changes also preserve the authenticity of the memory. While I want to imagine some of the nuances of my memories in different ways, I also don't want to completely change them. These memories are the only moments I still have with my mother, so the challenge is to make slight changes without compromising the integrity of the memory. Through the memory, I want to keep my mom alive.

“I didn't want to only write down memories about my life. They were already there in my mind.”

The quote is from my thesis. I also chose this innovative approach because I wanted my thesis/memoir to have something that makes it unique. As mentioned above, the memories were already there in my head and while capturing it on paper, I wanted to write something else. I wanted the reader to think about the way I wrote it and mull over it even after they are done reading. I wanted the reader to gain something from it.

Many things trigger a memory such as smell or a place so, remembering a memory in its entirety is a little challenging. Remembering a memory brings back fragments of memories in the form of images. When I thought of a memory, I saw images which I turned to words on paper. I had to recollect the entire memory before I could start writing about it. In the process of recollecting the memory, I could feel myself living through those times. As I tried to think how I felt during those times, I felt myself become immersed within that world. Only after I remembered the whole memory, I realized that I'm actually sitting on a chair in front of my laptop trying to write.

The memories I have selected to write about in my thesis have significance. Each of the memories are moments in my life when my relationship with my mother developed. Even after several years, those memories stand out to me because of how I felt during those times. As my thesis is primarily about my mother, I have not included much of my father in it. However, my father plays an important role in a few chapters of my thesis, one of them being *Food is important*. When I had a fight with my father, I wanted an apology from him. However, when I ran away to my room without having dinner, my mother came to me. She consoled me and urged me to not skip meals because of the fight. Because of that moment, I learnt something about my mother. She will always be there to take care of my well-being. If it weren't for that fight with my dad, my mom would not have come to me. It gave me the feeling that someone cares about me. In that sense, I felt that my dad plays an important role in that particular memory. It was just one of the moments when I felt closer to my mother.

Another chapter would be *Swim-A-Thon*. When I was swimming for a charity event, my parents were there watching and supporting me. However, when my dad yelled out cheers of

encouragement such as 'you can do better' and 'you should keep going', I felt pressured rather than encouraged. I didn't want to hear how I could do better, I wanted my work to be appreciated. Just then, my mom yelled out 'you are doing amazing' and 'you are doing great'. She knew what I wanted to hear before I could even say anything. My mom's cheers helped and encouraged me to keep going. It was that moment when I realized my mom knew me well, maybe even better than I knew myself. Even though I didn't like what my dad said, he was the reason my mom came to my aid and motivated me to do better.

My work has been influenced by *The Magical Language Of Others* by E.J. Koh & *Childhood* by Nathalie Sarraute. *Childhood* by Nathalie Sarraute is a memoir where Sarraute has written about her childhood. The book was written when the author was 83 years old. However, it only contains her memories from the first 12 years of her life. Sarraute has written memories of her mother and her stepmother while asking herself to decipher or understand the preciseness of each memory. While the memories are an account of her life, the interrogation with herself within the memories make it seem like fiction. This unconventional method of her writing inspired me to take on a new approach towards my memoir.

Sarraute's *Childhood* inspired me, however *The Magical Language Of Others* by E.J. Koh plays a bigger part in my thesis. *The Magical Language Of Others* is also a memoir about how Koh's parents moved to Seoul for her father's job while leaving Koh and her brother in the States. The move was supposed to be for three years but stretched to seven. Koh has written her feelings about the abandonment and separation from her parents. In the span of seven years, Koh received letters from her mother. Since her mother's letters are in Korean, she translated them to English while including the hand-written Korean letters in the book. I have also translated

my letters to my native language 'Marathi'. It is the national language of the state of Maharashtra in India. It is where my mom and I grew up. We grew up in different places in the state however, the language we spoke was the same. While my mom grew up in a small town called Aurangabad, I grew up in the big city of Mumbai.

Writing letters addressed to my mom gave me a sense that it is something she could read. It gave me a feeling that I'm having a one-sided conversation with her. I translated my letters in Marathi because it is a language my mother was familiar with. While she understood English, she felt more comfortable reading and writing in Marathi. When my mom was alive, we communicated in Marathi. So, if I want to talk to her, instinctively I talk in Marathi.

While my thesis is titled as a grief journal, I have not talked about grief in detail. My thesis just has pleasant memories spent with my mother. In the context of remembering joyful memories, my thesis is actually a process of dealing with grief. Even though the memories are delightful, my mother's death make them seem sad.

As my memoir is a grief journal, I wrote about my mother's demise and my feelings about it. However, I want this memoir to celebrate my mother's death rather than mourning it.