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Dancing Queen Only 70

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I don't go to India because of the exotic colors and Bollywood dancing. I go because it's where my grandma's house is. I would go to Ohio if my grandma's house was there. India or Ohio, there's no big difference. For me, there's not much to do in the small Indian town and I just lounge around wherever my grandma is. When she's in the living room, I'm in the living room: sprawled across the crimson cushions on the wicker sofa. When she's in the kitchen, I'm there too, leaned against the royal blue fridge, holding my hand out for a taste of whatever she's cooking at every stage of preparation. I sneak some shredded coconut into my mouth when she's not looking. She asks me to put away the other half of the lime she's not using but I get a pinch of salt and sugar, smear it across the half and get to work snacking instead. A haphazard limeade- just the right mouthwatering balance of sweet, salty and sour. My grandma swats my arm when she realizes what I've done. She sees the bottom half of the lime peeping out from my duck lipped mouth and there's a break in her concentration. She stops measuring the dal and shoos me out. But not before I steal some dry dal and pop it into my mouth, making her laugh.

I'm not leaving her alone yet. I convince her to wave to me from the kitchen just so her arm fat can jiggle. It's truly a seismic event. The Friendliest Earthquake that Ever Did Exist.

Having been swatted out, I sit down on the freshly swept tile floor of the dining room blocking the doorway to the kitchen. I am Gandhi, and this is my sit in. While Gandhi and I may differ in our small ways, I knew I needed to stand up for my cause like he did. I get up the courage and confront my grandma:

“Ajji, I'm bored.”

Ajji has no time for this. She's cooking for goodness's sake. But she does take a break from all the mixing, measuring, and tasting to provide a solution for my boredom. I use the word solution as loosely as one can imagine.

“Namma, I know what you can do. Take a towel and dry all the dishes that have been washed this morning. It will be super fun.”

“Ajji, do you even know what super fun means?”

Ajji ignores my question and pulls the dish towel that she had had tucked into her sari like an apron and passes it over. I take the towel and drape it over my face as I dramatically slide from my cross-legged position into a splayed out, pretend faint. My sit in had been a success, but not in the way I imagined.

I act on my Grandma's thrilling recommendation and begin to dry the steel pots and pans. I beat out a rhythm with my open palms on the base of a pot and the metallic tinging fills the air. It is a sound that could get annoying very quickly. My prowess as a percussionist is short lived as my grandma half-jokingly glares with her eyebrows furrowed and I return the pot to where it is stored in the pantry.

I turn on the kitchen radio. It's old, bulky, and still has a slot to play cassettes. It doesn't get a signal well, so it is half leaning out of the window. I turn the dial so that I can capture the clearest version of my grandma's favorite station. The chorus of an old Kannada movie song strains through the kitchen. I start to dance, remixing the classical Indian dance steps I learned in Bharatanatyam class with the twerking I had “learned” watching Nicki Minaj's Anaconda music video. I would label the routine that ensued as “Experimental with a capital E.”

My grandma is unbothered, laughing with me. She turns the gas stove off having finally finished preparing lunch. I am able to grab her hands and dance with her, although she does

refuse to twerk with me. We twirl, and her arms jiggle. So, I twirl her again, and they jiggle again.

When I point that out, she boops me in my stomach and tells me that I jiggle too. She is right. A month in India and all the delectable food I had been gobbling down during each meal meant that, I did indeed jiggle.

“Because of your cooking” I accuse, wagging my finger. It is difficult to keep the angry front going because she has grabbed the rice dish she had prepared and placed it on the dining table to which I was instinctively drawn. I grab plates from the pile I had just dried, so we could eat the lime chitranna, bright yellow in its pot from the turmeric she had added to the rice.

We sit at the sturdy, untarnished teak dining table. I tap out a rapid drumroll to call the rest of our family to lunch. Ajji, in the middle of re-tucking the dish towel at the waist of her sari, sends me to the bathroom to wash my hands so that we can begin eating lunch. After lunch, my grandma and I have some big plans. We are going to take our afternoon nap. Maybe, this time she won’t wake me up with her snoring.