

Mom's Jasmine-Chamomile Tea

Thick tendrils of smoke from the yellow cabs wafted through the air, its pungent sulfuric odor causing Grace's nose to wrinkle in disgust. Grace skittered alongside the busied streets, clutching a paper bag of multiple Purell bottles, toilet paper rolls, and Doritos.

It was Grace's turn to go on a grocery run during this pandemic, and the chance to escape her hectic home life was seldom. Despite the chaos of the novel Coronavirus, the street corners were still vibrant with life as children scrawled chalk portraits upon the asphalt. Grace came to her apartment building, the door creaking loudly as she pushed the matted wood ajar. Through the thick bark, she could still hear the muffled sounds of her parents' constant bickering. Grace swung the door open and tossed the groceries into the foyer. She slammed the door shut and was met with the disapproving glares of her mother and father.

“*What?*”

“Where is your *mask*, Graciella Marie?”

Grace groaned. Her mother did this *every* time she entered the house. Due to her father's crippling asthma, her parents had been testing left and right for COVID-19, taking extreme precautions everywhere they treaded. As soon as anyone entered the house they had to discard their mask, throw their top layers into the laundry basket, and spray their keys and phones with Lysol.

“Now Margaret dear, don't you think you're being overdramatic with these safety protocols?” her husband gibed as Margaret scowled.

Prior to the virus, Grace had busied herself with schoolwork and extracurriculars. Although her Power Writing course on Zoom provided her an outlet, staying home with her parents squabbling proved a frustrating new obstacle.

The invective language spewing from her parents continued until Grace bellowed, “Can you *please* stop. It’s already hard enough to focus when you guys talk during school; can I just get a moment of solace?”

Her parents uttered an apology as she slipped into her bedroom, diving beneath woolen fabric as she slowly lulled herself into slumber.

It was Saturday when she had awoken. Grace swung out of bed and trudged towards the kitchen for breakfast. Her parents sat at the marbled table, speaking in hushed tones before falling to silence at the sight of their daughter. Grace noticed that her parents were sitting farther from each other than usual as she retrieved her orange juice.

“Grace, darling,” her mother cut through the silence as Grace swished the juice around her mouth. “We have news to share with you. Don’t freak out, but my results came back. It’s positive.”

The glass tumbled from her fingertips and crashed down into a cacophony of cracks.

“You know your father has asthma, and he can’t be around me for a little while. ”

Grace paused, looking between both of her parents, “Where’s dad going to go? What’ll happen to you?”

Her mother went on to explain that Grace and her father would spend the weekend with her grandparents while she stayed home and nursed herself back to health. A foreign feeling began to bubble within her as Grace remembered all of those times her mother took care of *her* when she was sick. “Well, mom, *I* don’t have asthma. Why can’t *I* take care of you?”

“It’s too dangerous, honey, you’re better off with your father.”

Grace shook her head in disagreement, “No mom, I mean, *I*’ve been out a lot on grocery runs. I would be dangerous to dad, grandma and grandpa. It’s safer for them if I stay here.”

Her father paused before mumbling to his wife that Grace had a point, in which Grace continued, “And I’ll stay 6 feet apart. I’ll follow the disinfectant protocol, and I’ll clean everything, mom. *Please?*”

Sharing a look with her husband, Margaret reluctantly agreed, “Fine.”

That was last week, and since then Grace was tasked with nursing her mother back to health while her father was away at her grandparents’ home. Grace hurried through the kitchen, her hair glued to her forehead with sweat as she hurried off to check on her mother.

Margaret lay on her bed, swaddled in cotton sheets with damp paper towels splayed across her forehead. Her once fair complexion was now riddled with gunk and red smudges that decorated her face in an amalgamation of splotches. Grace parted her mother’s dark hair away from her deep brown eyes.

Grace had never noticed how deeply brown her mother’s eyes were. Taking care of Margaret made Grace aware of a *lot* of things about her mother that she was previously too uninterested to notice. Her mother liked to mix jasmine tea and chamomile, she liked listening to jazz piano, and her favorite card game was Palace.

Every day, Grace discovered something new and interesting about her, and with each moment, although her sick mother was often in pain and ran her ragged, she learned something about *herself* and how much she’d been missing all these years.

A coughing fit that burst from her mother delivered her back to a time four years prior. “Grace, what’s wrong?”

Her mother's voice sounded distant in her mind as multiple visions flooded through her brain. When Grace was twelve, that same coughing fit erupted from within her as she choked on chicken soup her mother had labored timelessly on. The towel that rested upon her mother's forehead shared the same hue of the bandages she wrapped around Grace's sprained ankle, and the same jasmine-chamomile tea was in her fingers when Grace had cried over a bad day at school. Seeing her mother in such an impaired state mirrored periods of Grace's weakness all throughout her life that her mother had helped her through.

Margaret extended her hand out towards her daughter's face, and carefully brushed her fingers underneath Grace's eyelids, collecting the tears as they fell, "I'll be alright."

Grace sniffled and nodded, "I know mom. I love you."

And for the first time in her life really, Grace understood *why* she loved her mother, and she wasn't going to let the Coronavirus take it away from her, "Come on mom, I'll go get you some jasmine-chamomile tea."