

Dear Amal,

I was not jealous of all the attention you'll get when mom and dad told me I was going to have a little sister. Not even when they bought a crib for you where I spent the first two years of my life, sleeping on a floor mattress. But I did envy you when I realized you had a protective womb shielding you from the deadly outside world and I didn't. I still find it hard to believe that you'll be all grown up as you're reading this all and intelligent just like your sister here! I hope you're living a blissful life, for I'm not.

You never know when a slight drizzle can turn into a violent storm.

What seemed to be a two weeks' much needed mid-spring break came to be an incessant imprisonment at our very own home. The suddenness of how life took a u turn in a matter of weeks makes this even more chilling.

You must know what I'm talking about. You must have books lined up with the struggles of millions others like me. But this is my story; sister to sister, never to be known by anyone else.

Looking back I realize how naïve I was. Pandemic, quarantine, SARS - terms I never heard before. The more everything made sense , the more my heart shrank. I was such blinded by my faith in technology that the thought of a possible outbreak never occurred to me. 193 countries, 7.9 billion people versus a virus. Can you imagine? Is this Mother Nature's rage? Is she being vengeful? Are we being punished for wrecking her world? Does that mean we're being held captives in our very own homes? Or maybe she's ushering. us to our senses; making us realize our mindless wrongdoings - just how ma would do if I did something wrong. Maybe this is why nature is a SHE; a mother to the mankind.

The virus is deadly and so is losing hope. Numbed by the already wrecked up world I didn't know what to do. Those death counts - huge numbers - became something we had to hear every single day. The brushes and paints didn't pique my interests. For the first time I abandoned an unfinished painting.

I didn't know what to do when mom sank into depression. I just stood there motionless as she kept

struggling with sleep and appetite. Why didn't I do anything? I could have stroked her head and comforted her by saying "Ma don't worry everything's going to be fine." Truth be told, I didn't know if things were going to be okay. I couldn't help our mom. What kind of daughter does that make me?

Sometimes I wished all these were a nightmare. That I'd jolt up with the alarm going off and ma telling me I'd be late for school. once my third grade English teacher had asked what I feared most. I remember answering thunderstorms and spiders. But now I'd say it's death as well as the fear of losing someone.

Just when things were being a little easy on us, the unimaginable happened - phuppi passed away. you may not know her Amal, but she was a great person, the best aunt to me - grandma's only daughter.

A little ill at the morning, grasping for life in evening, and gone by night - that's what covid does to you.

Phuppi was rested in our family burial ground. Guilt stabbed in the heart when I went near her. I took the times spent with her for granted. I'd never get to see the smile that bloomed on her face every year as I handed her a saree to wear on eid.

I fled from her funeral to the Woods nearby as I couldn't bear seeing her lifeless face. Amal, she was so excited about you; making these nakshikantha baby quilts, one of which I managed to get from her crowded bedroom. The outlines of the floral motifs on it had been embroidered in black. Fate didn't let her embroider the rest of it. But I've to - to keep you warm as you arrive in the freezing January.

Because the world is a wheel that never stops spinning. You've to carry on what others have left. You have to fight your way through unfortunate times with trust and patience.

The sun is setting among the foliage, marking the end of the last day of the year and the arrival of a new dawn of a new year. I may have lost Phuppi but I still got the hopes of meeting you soon. your name means 'hope'Amal. And that is what's unique to you. You've been fueling my hopes for better times.

This story doesn't end here. You don't know what's coming next in life. But never lose hope Amal -never.

Your sister,

Nubaysha

