

Dear Ammachy,

Five of your nutmeg trees fell down in a storm on Saturday in the middle of May. For decades they stood tall, filling the now rather empty backyard. Suddenly, there was blank space that foliage once occupied. Then on Sunday night, I couldn't fall asleep for a long time. I was anxious about something—I couldn't say what. I woke up on Monday morning to a message from Pa saying they had rushed you to the hospital in the early morning. This hospital business had happened a few times in the recent past, so although I was worried, I knew you would pull through. You always did.

About 20 minutes later: 'Ammachy is gone...'

Impossible. But there it was. Your nutmeg trees seemed to know your time had come, and decided to journey with you. On some level I had also known before I really knew, but I stayed to remember you.

To say you were a pillar in our lives is an understatement. You are reason we all exist, and the reason we call ourselves a family. You were the epitome of a grandmother—warm, cute, soft, generous. You were my only grandparent and, in a strange way, my third parent. It was always easy to pick my 'favourite' when Ma and Pa asked which parent I liked best, because it was undeniably you. There was never a competition, no matter how much they tried.

I often played over in my head how I would react when you passed. To tell you the truth, I never felt a thing. I think the reason I didn't feel sad was not because I wasn't attached to you or that I felt no love for you. It was because a world without Ammachy was inconceivable. You had this inevitability, this immortality, about you. But when you actually moved on, I felt many things, primary among them shock. You had been sick for some time, and intellectually I knew that your time was coming. In fact I said this to several people who asked about you, maybe as a way to prepare myself. But nothing could have prepared me.

I attended your funeral, and I still can't believe you're gone. I don't think it'll hit me until the next time we're at a family gathering and you don't come out to spend time with us after one of your classic naps. Even at the funeral I thought you would come along soon enough, after a bath, or your TV serial, or a nap. It might feel real one day when I'm travelling, and I go to pick out a souvenir bell for you. But perhaps it'll really hit me in about a month, when you don't call the day before my birthday in a panic about forgetting to wish me. You never forgot. Although, even if you did, who could blame you? You had *so* many to remember.

We weren't in touch on a daily or even always a weekly basis, but you were always with me. And you continue to be. I look in the mirror and I see your eyes, your smile. I see the wild hair that you always wanted me to tame, and often remember (and laugh about) the time you offered to give me your own comb, to no avail. I pick out my clothes every day, almost always shorts, and think about how you would hate but begrudgingly accept them as long as I didn't wear them in Kerala. Every time I feel cold when everyone else is sweating, I know you would agree and that it's because of the tropical/coastal blood which I get from you. I spread the patchwork quilt you made me over my bed every day, and you are here.

I think about the mangos, the pickles, the poot, the fact that the poot you mixed for me tasted better than anything else, the fried chicken for when I didn't eat fried fish, the cake, the cookies, the waffles, the beach, how you couldn't understand why I loved the beach, going to church with you, saying the rosary, visiting you wherever you were in the world, your cat and snake enemies,

your unfailing birthday and Christmas presents, the fact that you made friends on every bus/train/plane journey you took (that is, when you weren't asleep), your sewing, your TV serials, every time you started reading something and promptly fell asleep, your collection of bells, your video games, your sarees, stories of your childhood, of my childhood, your sniff-kisses, and so much more, and I miss you.

I guess we will meet again someday, somehow. Until then, I have my memories of almost 29 good years.

Love,
Dayita