

Racing Against Death

Category: The Phone Call

written by Aparna Chandrasekhar | November 2, 2017

My parents and I were rushing to D.C. to be by my grandmother's side—I from Boston by plane, they from Pittsburgh by automobile. It was a cloudy morning.

Upon reaching Reagan National Airport, I switched my mobile out of airplane mode and saw a text from my sister: *call mum right now*. Despite being the older sibling, I always followed my sister's instructions and obediently called our mum.

She answered on the first ring, and I immediately heard the sadness in her voice. I already knew but had to hear her say it: "Ap, I'm so sorry—she passed away a couple hours ago."

My mum had never liked my father's mother, but she knew I adored her. Grandmother had been an English major and also had a keen eye for art, and we would spend weeks debating the best painting in existence depicting the demise of St. John the Baptist (sorry, folks—*not* the Caravaggio!). I had been eager to relive those moments of impassioned conversation and to capture one final memory of her, but that evidently was not in store. Instead, she had expired by herself in the nursing home. With a feeding tube. In a diaper.

As if sensing my sorrow, the rain had started to fall, possibly to keep company with the tears that were streaming down my face. I had not yet hung up with my mother, so we remained on the line for the next thirty minutes as we separately made our way to the nursing home. My sobs occasionally punctuated the silence, but I had never been more grateful for quiet, as this stillness was loaded with meaning: we were both still there.

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