

Keep Your Promise

Prabakaran Balaharish

Raffles Institution
1 Raffles Institution Ln, Singapore 575954

“Mummy, are you going already?” Ella, who had just woken up to the sight of her mother sporting on a white coat, asked. “Yes, dear,” her mother replied, as she strode over to Ella’s bed. Ella reached out her hand to touch her mother’s face but withdrew immediately. Her mother knelt by her, smiling sadly. Worry and anxiety was etched in every wrinkle on her otherwise smooth face, with her muted brown eyes speaking volumes of stress and tension.

“Bye.”

With a whisper, her mother left in a hurry. Ella sat up immediately, causing dark spots to dance in front of her eyes. Her head started aching, and she couldn’t help but feel like banging it against something. Her hand was numb, and she couldn’t even move it since it was connected to a dozen drips. The nurse in the corner of the room saw that she had woken up, and came quickly over to her side, to change the drips and to give her morning dose of medicine and vitamins. It had all become such a routine to her, that she didn’t even know how much time has passed since she was admitted.

Ella was diagnosed with Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Something that she couldn’t even pronounce. It all started with a small red bump. At first, she had dismissed it as a mozzie bite, but it had started spreading and became bigger. She could still remember the look of terror on her mother’s face when she had shown it to her. Ella was immediately whisked to the hospital, where the other doctors confirmed her mother’s suspicion.

Ella was unable to understand anything. She was only 8 after all. But she did realise she was seriously ill, and close to dying – from how her mother sobbed by her side at night when she thought Ella was asleep. From how the doctors’ faces subtly darkened, as though in defeat. From the exaggerated kindness the nurses were showing her.

She was put to another dose of painkillers, and soon enough, she went to the darkness, once again.

She woke up, to find herself in a hut. All signs of the hospital had been removed completely. She was no longer even connected to the drips, and nor was she lying on the hospital bed. She was on some cane bed of sorts, in theme with the surrounding objects in the hut. A rather weird and herbal smell permeated her nostrils, as a warm hand touched her forehead. She looked to her side, to see her mother, knelt and smiling at her.

But something was off. Ella’s mother loved to wear makeup and couldn’t be seen without her signature red lipstick and blushing rouge-filled cheeks. But this woman was au naturale, with no signs of makeup, yet, still beautiful. “Mummy... are you Mummy?” Ella asked, her breath hitching mid-sentence. The woman giggled, the sound akin to the gurgling of a stream. “I am Mother to all, my darling.” The woman whispered, as soft as snowfall.

“Who are you?” Ella asked, puzzled.

“I am Mother Earth,” she replied, and stood up, revealing her flowing dress, constantly shifting images of nature. Ella was at a loss of words. “Why... why did you bring me here?” she asked, not daring to speak up against whatever being she was.

It seemed as though Mother Earth sensed her fright. She knelt back down by Ella's side. "You need not be afraid of me. I brought you here to heal you."

With that, she grabbed Ella's arm gently. There were dozens of itchy bumps and rashes all over it, over which she rubbed her fingers. Ella winced and closed her eyes, bracing herself for pain, but only receiving a warm painless jolt.

"There."

Ella looked at her arm, and her other one. She looked at her legs and felt along her neck. There were no more bumps or rashes. She sat up immediately.

"Now, I don't have enough time with you," Mother Earth held onto her hands and looked at her. Her face was troubled, with the pupils in her electric blue eyes constricting.

"I need to tell you one thing. Do you know about bacteria and antibiotics?"

Ella nodded.

"Well, ever since antibiotics were introduced to this world, they have been used in farms and for agricultural purposes. The same ones that are used to treat common diseases and infections. Many were banned, but some are legally allowed to be used, whether it is injected into livestock, or part of the herbicide used to kill weeds growing near crops."

"Why are they used?"

Mother Earth, sighed. "Many reasons. Most of the time it is to keep livestock or crops healthy, especially in large-scale farming, where diseases are easily spread. But in bacteria themselves, some are resistant to antibiotics. When non-resistant bacteria are killed by antibiotics, resistant bacteria remain alive. From there, they multiply to become more. From the farms, they come to your fork, when you eat your meat, and even your vegetables and fruits."

Ella cringed on the thought of those ugly bacteria that her mother had once taught her about, on her plate and crawling into her mouth.

"Is that how I got ill?" She asked.

Mother Earth nodded. "The bacteria inside you is resistant to Methicillin, which is a common antibiotic used to treat diseases. That bacteria have made you ill. After all, the bacteria want to live as well."

"What do we do now?" Ella asked, feeling disgusted that due to a farmer's ignorance, so many were affected.

"I cannot do anything. But I know that you can do something about this." Mother Earth looked up. A large gust of wind blew through the window at the bed. Mother Earth's hair was whipped about her head. Objects in the hut started flying in the wind, including the door which unhinged from the door frame and flew out of the hut.

"Our time's up, Ella. Promise me that you will help humankind," Mother Earth said, her voice almost getting caught up in the loud gust of the wind. Ella nodded, as Mother Earth leant in to wrap her in a hug.

Some heavy object hit her head, and she blacked out.

“Ella! Ella!” someone was shaking her. She opened her eyes, to see that she was back in the hospital. “Oh.” It had all been a dream.

“Ella! How are you feeling?” It was her mother, sitting by her side. “Show me your bumps.” She examined Ella’s arms and legs. Her brows knit together in confusion, and her eyes widened with shock.

“Ella, did you scratch away your bumps?” Her voice carried notes of disappointment and anger. Ella shook her head and looked down at her arms. There were really no bumps or rashes.

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Ella grew up to graduate in Agriculture and proceeded to innovate ideas to farm without any antibiotics. She not only farmed successfully in her home country but was able to engage in international agricultural trade. She was a big inspiration to many in the world and was able to accumulate a worldwide following. She became well-known for her mission against antibiotic resistance and started a worldwide foundation to help those struck by antibiotic resistance.

She never forgot her promise to Mother Earth.

(1212 words)

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