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Yasmina and the Jasmine

by

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“Mum, this white flower is beautiful, it smells so nice for its size” Yasmina says returning the tiny flower to the small cup.

“I got it from Mrs. Sawsan” says her mother who peels the potatoes in the kitchen. Yasmina picks a bowl and helps her mother washing the potatoes and says “Mrs Sawsan who?” giving her another peeled potato says “who has the veranda full of flowers in the other side of the building”.

Yasmina closes the water tap after filling the pot and asks “What is the name of the flower?”

“It is the Fulla, Arabian Jasmine.” She scrapes another potato then gives it to Yasmina to clean it. Washes her hand and continues “Mrs Sawsan is very proud of her flowers. She gave me the Fulla, and something else for you.”

Mum opens the fridge and takes out a beautiful necklace of little white flowers which smell cram the place.

Yasmina looks to the necklace, opens her eyes wide and intakes a deep breath full of the smell, dries her hand and touches it.

Mum puts it around her neck.

Yasmina smiles very happy, keeps touching the little flowers and smelling them.

“Why for me Mum??”

“Because!”

And she goes back peeling the last potato, smiles in anticipation of anger and says “Because you will take care of her flowers”.

“Me? What?” Yasmina approaches.

“Mrs. Sawsan wouldn’t accept to travel until I offered her to take care of her flowers during her absence.”

Mum washes the last potato and drops it in the pot then dries her hand saying without looking to Yasmina.

“Since her elevator broke yesterday, I told her that you will do the job instead of me.”

Yasmina turns her mother’s face to look in her eyes and says “what job Mum?”

Mum smiles and blinks “Watering her garden”.

- “Garden? Says Yasmina touching the Fulla and leaning to smell it again. “I know gardens are in big houses like my grandma’s garden on the mountains. But here on a slip of a veranda?”
- “Yes, that’s how she refers to her veranda.”
- “And how am I supposed to do it?”

Mum puts her hands around Yasmina’s neck, kisses her on her cheek, touches the Necklace and says “She prepared a list of instructions and she sent this for you as a token of appreciation”

- “Muum, do I have to do it?”
- “Do you want me to go up four floors every day?”

Yasmina kisses her mother back and says “Of course not.”

Yasmina opens the door of the veranda, goes out and says “and where is she going?” following her out, Mum says “She is going to Canada to visit her son and his

family; they couldn't come for three years because of the political situation." Then points south and says

- "Look there."

The big veranda full of flowers catches her eyes; from the little she can see, she can tell that the place is full of colours.

"I never noticed it before; though it looks so interesting to see."

Mum goes back to the kitchen puts the pot on the stove to boil the potatoes.

"Be ready at four"

"Okay Mum".

The grand-ma opens the door. "Come in." Her big smile brightens her beautiful face.

"Hello Mrs Sawsan, this is my daughter Yasmina".

"You are both most welcome, Come in" and closes the door.

Mum follows Mrs Sawsan into the apartment, she glances back to Yasmina who smiles and winks. She can tell already she is going to like this friendly flower loving old lady.

The grandma leads the way to the veranda saying "shall we sit in my garden"

Yasmina follows Mum and the grandma, looking around if any one else is there. Gazing to some photo frames put nicely on the side table of the seating room which leads to the veranda.

She stops at the door.

- Wow, Mum told me that you have a beautiful garden but I didn't realise it is this nice.

Flower pots surround the place; some are proper ceramic pots with different colours, some are plastic ones and others are old tin pots.

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- “Thank you my dear Yasmina. You are just as beautiful with your lovely name”.

Says grandma.

Yasmina blushes. Thinks how sweet this grandma is.

They sat at a round table in the centre, on plastic chairs covered with green cushions. On the table there is a vase with beautiful roses.

- “Come and look at my Jasmine climbing up the wall at the entrance, it is full of life like you. Your mother assured me that you will take good care of it during my absence”.

Yasmina couldn’t hide her astonishment and says:

- “Yes of course Mrs. Sawsan, don’t you worry.”
- “That is great.”
- “And I have to thank you for the lovely necklace”

Grand-ma smiles widely and says “Did you like it?”

“Oh I loved it, do you think I will be able to make the same?”

Grandma takes Yasmina by her hand and says touching the little white flowers. “Let me tell you about it. In the morning it is full of flowers” She takes two flowers and gives them to Yasmina and her mother to smell them. “But at noon I collect most of the flowers and make a beautiful necklace and offer it to whoever visits me.” She picks a round bamboo box with a needle and a thread and says “These are the tools.”

“Oh I see. It is not difficult then.”

While cuddling the yellow flower grandma says “Here is the Iris, the translation of my name”

“These are Pansy of different colours” grandma points to the four pots on the right side of the table. “They will die soon when August approaches, so don’t worry and just keep watering them.”

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She turns her back on the pansies and leans over a small bench at the back of the veranda.

“And here is my rose garden. The second day of blooming I cut them and put them in this vase. Aren’t they beautiful?” Her eyes gleam and she goes to the vase arranging the roses. “In my absence you can take them home.”

Yasmina is astonished by how passionately she talks about her flowers. Yasmina’s mother picks up a nice green bucket from the floor and says “This is for watering the pots, right?”

“Of course” replies Grandma. “And here is my lovely Fulla, full of buds.”

Yasmina interrupts her saying “I loved the smell when Mum had one yesterday”.

She cuts one Fulla and gives it to Yasmina saying “Dear Yasmina, when you come here every day and become my garden’s friend, you will love the smell and the sight and the company of my flowers.”

Yasmina smiles, nods and looks at her mother.

Before sitting, Grand-ma pulls herself inside “I will get us some juice”.

When alone, mum asks “What do you think?”

“I understand now Mum, why she is calling it her garden” says Yasmina

Mum winks her eyes smiling and says “I am sure you will love it.”

“Muum, I am doing it for you.”

The grandma returns with a tray and three glasses of orange juice and a photo frame, offers the juice then holds the frame with passion and says “This is my sons family, I am going there for I miss them so much.” Puts her hand on the faces and says “I wish Beirut was in a better condition and they would come to visit me.”

Mum looks at the photo and says “God bless them I am sure you will enjoy your time with them”. Yasmina bends over to see. “Oh, her grand son looks so handsome.”

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She thinks, and blushes. Then takes a sip of her juice looking around and thinking of her new duties”

When about to leave, Grandma hands the key to Yasmina and says “please don’t forget to greet my plants every time you come here, touch them and always give them my love”.

Walking back home, Yasmina asks “Mum, she wants me to greet the plants, is she weird or something?”

Tapping on her shoulder Mum says “trust me; very soon you will change your mind”.

Every time Yasmina goes to Grandma’s house, she holds the green bucket and waters as instructed.

The first week, she spends a short time out in the garden then goes inside finding the family photo on the side table, and thinks “will she like him when they will meet in Montreal? Maybe they will go to the same university and be good friends.”

The second week, She enjoys cutting the roses and brings them home, puts them in the vase and arranges the colours.

When Yasmina comes back one day, she finds her father at home having coffee with her mum on their veranda. She gives him the Fulla flower. He thanks her and says, “Yasmina? I hear that, day after day you delay coming back from Grandma’s house. You like it there? I remember when I was taking you to the mountain to my parent’s house. You wouldn’t touch the flowers. What is the matter?”

Yasmina replies “Dad, you can’t believe it, it is a beautiful garden. The plants and the flowers touch my heart. Yesterday, when I saw four new Pansy flowers blooming, I felt very happy. I enjoy making the jasmine necklace. I gave it to my friend

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Dalia today, and she loved it. Dad, I enjoy so much sitting in the garden and reading my books.”

“Slow down, what about the computers” says Dad.

“She forgot about it”. Counters Mum.

“Dad, what computer and the electricity is cut most of the time.

“I envy you” Dad says. “I always wished to have time to spend in my mother’s garden up in the mountain before she died.”

“Maybe we should make the effort now Dad.” She jumps to his neck, kisses him on his cheek and says “I was thinking the other day that we have to go there, I am so interested now.”

Her mum looks to Dad and nod smiling and says to her “So what should I tell grandma when she calls tomorrow?”

“If I am not here, tell her that her flowers say hello to her and I will relay any message from her to them.” says Yasmina.

“Are you weird or something” and laughs Mum.

“Mummy, apparently when you feel the flowers, you talk to them.” She bow and continues “You were right about that”.

When the war breaks out on the twelfth of July, Yasmina’s parents became very strict concerning leaving the building where they stay. The situation is not safe at all and the Israeli missiles are hitting everywhere so it is always better to be home.

Yasmina is allowed to go with her brother once every two days to check the garden. She goes alone and delays, breaking her dad’s rules. She ignores the news and what is happening around. Whenever her father discusses the politic situation, she changes the subject and talks about the flowers, like as if she is living in a different world.

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Grandma calls, Yasmina picks the telephone, Grand-ma worried asks about the family's safety, and Yasmina's eyes sparkling and her voice crooning, she tells her about the status of every single pot and the colour of every rose, as if the war is a lie.

Most Lebanese run away from their houses in the city up to the mountain scared of Israeli bombs.

"I am not leaving my garden" says Yasmina.

"Not because of your garden," says Dad, "but I am not convinced to leave the flat yet. I don't feel that our area is targeted" then adds firmly "But when we decide to go, no one has any saying".

It is early morning. At the first sound of warplanes, every one is awake and runs downstairs. The bombardment starts heavily; battery radios in every hand announce that Israel is attacking all the bridges. Their building is just behind the Fidar Bridge.

Dad says: "I hope it is not going to be hit?"

All the neighbours run down to the ground floors not to be in danger in case the bridge is hit. They pray together.

At ten minutes past nine, a very loud explosion is heard then louder continuous explosions followed in different places. The breaking of window glass is heard, people shouting and children screaming and crying. All are asking what happened? Where did the strike reach? Is any one injured?

After fifteen minutes of quiet, People start running up and down the stairs. They want to check the damages.

Voices of young men here and there saying, "no one is injured but a lot of damages occurred. Windows and veranda doors are broken. Just one big shell hit the fourth floor and destroyed the veranda of the next building. Don't go out yet.

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Yasmina, sitting in a corner, hears the voice and anticipates in disbelief that it is Grandma's garden. She gets on her feet "My garden, my garden" and rushes out when her brother starts shouting "don't let her out, don't let her out."