

What It Takes

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I always hated the smell of my grandpa. He smelled like he hadn't taken a bath for a whole week. Actually, that's the reason why he was so stinky. He really took a bath once a week only.

However, I had to endure this awful smell because I slept in the same room with my grandparents. I didn't have my own room, my own space, my own privacy, and my own freedom.

So finally I decided.

Grandma's eyes were blurred by tears. She gave me a big hug, and said, "Eat more when you're abroad." I waved to her, and went straight to the customs. I turned my head— my grandma was still standing there, so old, so weak. I was afraid that I would change my mind if I stood there one more moment, so I waved to her again and quickly walked in to look for my boarding gate.

I was escaping from my home. I had told myself I was fed up with all these things at home. Parents' annoyance, brother's retarded behaviors, and grandparents' burden. I wanted to have a space for myself. Therefore, I found the chance to Berlin to be an exchange student for one year. At first, my father didn't allow me to go. However, my mother supported me, and she said, "You should have more experiences," so the thing was settled. What about my grandparents? Did they have any rights to change my decision? At that time, I hesitated for long, but after my friends talked to me, I decided. They said, "Don't let them be the barrier of your life."

On the plane, I felt calm, peaceful, and awfully happy. I finally escaped. I finally could pursue my dream.

I hated my mom always talking about my future job; I hated my father always disturbing me whenever I was occupied by a lot of things; I hated my brother always doing something on purpose to make me mad. Moreover, it's disgusting whenever I cleaned up my grandpa's excrement, and I hated that I was not able to sleep well at night because I had to keep an eye on my grandpa for fear that he would fall down.

"Maybe the only person I will miss is my grandma," I told myself.

One year passed through quickly, and I seldom called back home. I only sent emails to them. Whenever they asked why I didn't call them, I just told them that it cost a lot to call. When they said we could use Skype, I told them it would disturb my roommate. Maybe I just wanted to make some excuses.

My grandma called me approximately once a month, and every time she would ask me the same question, "Did you eat well?" And every time my answer was "Yes."

One time when my grandma called me, she sounded like a little bit choked by sob. I asked her what happened, but she only said, "Nothing, just miss you so much."

That night, I dreamed about my grandparents, and after I woke up, I suddenly burst into tears.

The day for me to go back to Taiwan had been quietly approaching.

That morning, at the airport, my grandma was there as she had promised, with my father. Grandma looked older. When I came closer, her eyes were filled with tears.

Father uttered a sentence, "Your grandfather is in the intensive care unit."

My grandfather was in the intensive care unit.

Shocked by the news, I looked at them and asked, "From when?"

"One month ago."

One month ago? And I didn't know?

"The doctor said your grandpa is in the most critical 48-hour period. We will know the outcome at 2 o'clock in early morning tomorrow."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Your grandpa said, 'Don't call Yani to come back; she has to concentrate on her study.'"

I began to sob, and everyone at the airport was looking at me.

But I didn't care.

Because there were only two meeting times a day for the intensive care unit, we had to get there in time to catch up with the first meeting in the morning.

When I rushed to the hospital, I stood in front of the cold-blooded and hard-hearted steel door. I glared at the door angrily, but at the same time nervously.

I had been here for several times. Every time I came here, it was because of my grandpa. I put on the sterilized gown; when pushing on the bottom of the door opening, my hand kept trembling.

Grandpa was there. His hands were tied because he would pull away the tubes which could make him live longer. Basically he was calm, but after he saw me, he became agitated, seeming like wanting to say something. But he couldn't speak because he was wearing an oxygen mask. The nurse loosed his hand, and brought a piece of paper to him. He wrote down a line "study hard" with his trembling hand. After that, his breath became even shorter and more rapid. The nurse called other nurses and the doctor to come, and then asked us to stand outside.

They were giving my grandpa first aid.

Through the chink of the curtain, I could see the electrocardiogram on the screen of the machine—it was almost a straight line. Now they were giving him an electric shock.

I prayed to god. I told god that my grandpa was such a good person, so a good person should have a good consequence.

Thirty minutes later, the doctor and nurses came out. They said sorry to us and asked us to see my grandpa for the last time.

They said sorry to us.

Go to see your grandpa for the very LAST TIME.

My eyes became hollow; my brain became blank. I couldn't think or talk, just staring at them unbelievably.

They must be kidding me.

The last line my grandpa gave me is "study hard."

When I came back to my home, I went straight to the room. I was too tired to cry. I didn't want to hear my parents talking about my grandpa's funeral. I locked the door. I refused everyone to come in.

I only open the window, intending to let the wind calm myself.

Maybe this is what I have to pay.

Every dream takes something away from us. Someone loses his money; someone loses her health; someone loses his friends; someone loses her lover.

And I lose my grandpa. That's what it takes.

I could still tell my grandpa's smell. It smelled like he hadn't taken a bath for a whole week. The only difference was, my grandpa would no longer be there.