

## Draw

The door creaked shut. *Oh no...he is going to find me.* Quickly, I squeezed between the food dehydrator used to make mango candy and the Christmas wrapping paper collection of my Hindu grandparents. My scrawny arms hugged my legs, gripping them firmly. I tried to make myself as compact as possible, out of view from anyone who passed, especially Papa.

“Ready or not...Here I come,” called Papa. I squeezed my eyes shut. *If I can't see him, he definitely can't see me.* Right away, I heard him race down the stairs on a mission to find me. His footsteps approached the room that I was concealed in. The door creaked open, creating the same noise that it had produced earlier. Letting just one of my eyes open, slightly, I saw Papa's figure illuminated by the bright lights of the hallway. *I had lost again...*

“I found you!” he shouted, excitedly. As we walked up the carpeted stairs of my grandparent's house, he said, “You can't always hide in the same place. I will keep finding you *Beta* (loving term for child).”

Papa and I bonded over games of any style. Things that did not seem like games to most, were always turned into one by us. It began with a plastic cash register, imitating the health foods store Nano used to own when she first came to America. This became a counting game of addition and subtraction. Eventually, this shifted into our intense games of hide-and-seek that always ended with us both exhausted on the brown leather sofa.

Once I was old enough, he introduced me to some of the most important aspects of his life, always making them into games. As a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Minnesota, our activities were not only games but there was always a lesson attached as well. Challenging me with high-level theoretical math problems, his eyes sparkled with pride, as well

as amusement, from my eight-year-old responses. One day, however, he finally presented me with the most important game of his life: chess.

Nano and Papa immigrated from India during the Partition, as the first in both of their families. They came with very little and brought only their most important belongings. One of the items that Papa deemed as worthy of transitioning to his new life in America was a checkered, 8x8 grid of wood. This board fostered all of our Saturday chess games and was the place where I connected with Papa the most.

Each Saturday, I sprinted from our car to the front door of my grandparents's house. As my mom collected the letters that were piling in their mailbox, I waited for one of them to answer the door. I peeked through the stained glass window, attempting to gauge the time until our games could finally begin. Once the door opened, the smell of Indian spices, cardamom, garam masala, and cumin, flooded into the air outside. I entered their home, embracing Nano and Papa with a big hug. I looked into Papa's eyes and he knew what time it was. On our way to our special table, we stopped for our ritual snack at Nano's treat bowl, each grabbing a handful of cashews. I carefully unlatched the rusted metal clasp that held the board together, allowing the black and white pieces to spill onto the table. Our hands chased after each piece and placed them in their correct spaces. *Queen on her color*. I recalled what Papa had taught me from last Saturday, setting up the board flawlessly.

In the room over, the scent of saffron and coriander wafted into the air as the rest of my family bustled around in the kitchen. Cumin seeds popped as they danced in the scorching oil. Hot parathas flew in and out of view as my brother attempted to flip them. However, the commotion in the rest of the house was tuned out by our pure focus. Except for the slight snap in Papa's jaw each time he bit into a cashew, there was a concentrated silence at our table. Pieces

switched around the board, creating a sea of black and white. I moved my valiant rook across the board, putting his king in jeopardy. “Check!” I boasted. “Oh dear...Oh dear...,” he said, studying the board. I watched his hands hover over each piece as if contemplating every possible move. Finally deciding, he revealed his signature smirk. With a slight chuckle, he slid his knight in front of his king, protecting it from danger. “Checkmate,” he said, with a toothy grin across his face. I looked down at the board and my mouth dropped. It’s over. He had won. Not only had he saved his king, but he had threatened mine in the same move. Following the game, I awaited our ritual discussion. Pots and pans clanged around us, but he was focused on how I could improve. This time, I heard, “Open up the board *Beta*,” a strategy that I hadn’t seemed to grasp quite yet.

Papa never just let me win. He was providing me with the tools to do so on my own. My skills were improving, but his seemed to do the opposite. Throughout many years of games, I had an occasional win, usually meaning he wasn’t feeling well. In his last years of life, the Papa I knew was slowly and painfully stolen from me by Alzheimer’s. As his once keen mind started to fog, our relationship began to change and adapt. Our games transitioned from chess to checkers, the mahogany chess board being replaced by a jumbo burlap checkers mat. The sea of black and white that used to be our sanctuary each Saturday had turned into an ocean of black and red disks.

The Saturdays rolled by routinely, until one snowy morning in January. Bundled up in my winter jacket, I was ready for our checkers game, peeking through the stained glass window. Nano opened the door and behind her, Papa stood with his cheerful grin on his face. I looked at him, and with the same look of excitement from before we grabbed the checkers mat and some cashews, on our way to the table. We laid out all of the pieces, beginning our game. *Open up the board beta*. I made sure that each of my disks were in play, just as Papa had taught me in chess.

As the game progressed, Papa moved a large disk, not seeing that it opened up a double jump for me. *Jump. Jump.* I had taken two of his pieces. *Jump.* Another piece was taken. My stack of pieces piled up, However, a moment that was supposed to bring me pride was causing my stomach to twist and turn.

Something seemed off. I had rarely gotten to the point in a game against my brilliant Papa where I had the potential to win. His eyes were still concentrated on the board, attempting to think through his next move. He put his hand on another piece, shifting it and opening up a triple jump for me. *Is he letting me win? This can't be right.* At just eleven years old, my mind was spiraling, trying to figure out what was going on with my beloved grandfather. I moved my piece forward, opening up a simple jump for him to take. He missed it. Again, I tried to set up an obvious move for him, praying he would just see it. It seemed like the red disks were screaming out but not being heard by Papa. I kept setting up moves, all in hopes of his clever mind, fogged with disease, acknowledging them. Desperate to see the signature smirk that had accompanied me throughout my childhood, just one more time, I continued to try. He couldn't do it, but he smiled, bringing a bittersweet end to our final game.

During every game that I played with Papa, he understood my potential, providing me with what I needed to develop my skills. He never just *let* me win and made sure that each game was a learning experience for me. In our final game of checkers, I acknowledged that his mind was beginning to muddle, attempting to provide him with what he needed at that moment. Although Alzheimer's stole my Papa's intellectual mind, it was not capable of thieving us of the beautiful moments we had, in and out of our games. Ending in a draw, we both won the final game, seeing the happiness that had been fostered in our decade of time together.