

An Unusual Whiff Of Life



A Short Story
By
L. Pooja Rughoobur Bhunjun



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



L. Pooja Rughoobur Bhunjun is a former research and script writer as well as a television presenter, who owes her love of books to her mom, an insatiable bibliophile. She wrote her first script for a play at the tender age of nine and also acted in it. Repeatedly encouraged by her mom, her husband and her colleague, whom she fondly calls “Madame Veena”, she put pen to paper and gave free rein to her creativity. *An Unusual Whiff*

Of Life is her sincere attempt to share snippets of her imagination with those who especially love short stories. If she is not devoting her time to swimming or reading, Pooja can be seen exploring the natural landscape near her house along with her cat and her four dogs.

“Home sweet home!” exclaimed Yuvaisha, putting the grocery bags on the kitchen table, her blue mask still on her face.

Never in her life had she thought that she would have to go grocery shopping. She was used to ordering everything that she needed over the phone and have them delivered at home. It was more convenient, considering her hectic schedule in the administrative department, where she worked. She was lucky that her mother attended to the household chores. She did not have to worry about anything.

Things had been going on the right track, until the grand entry of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sudden, unexpected turn of events had caught her off guard. She still remembered the news anchor announcing that a virus was causing severe damage, proving to be a serious cause for worry as no cure had been found yet.

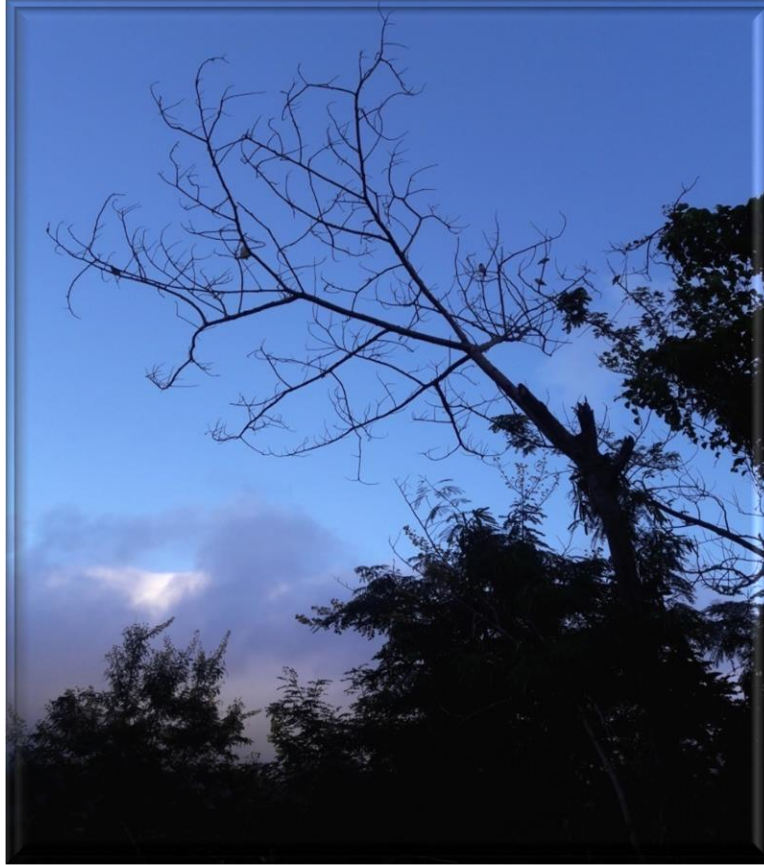
She had naively thought that the media was making a mountain out of a molehill. In a few weeks, everyone would have forgotten that a disease was threatening to turn things topsy-turvy and life would return to normal.

She could not have been more wrong. In a matter of days, not only did the COVID-19 spread its evil tentacles all across the globe, but it also took hold of her own country, the little paradise island, renowned for its gorgeous beaches and natural treasures.

The number of infected people was rising day by day, but, each time, she found it difficult to believe that even her country could be vulnerable. Nevertheless, she had to admit that Mauritius was making much progress and development at a rapid pace. With more and more people travelling to and from Mauritius, the attack from this unwanted visitor was imminent.

A feeling of dread overcame her. Many people had been quarantined, while some had already lost their lives. What would happen now?

Her overactive imagination started to picture the near future: a dark world, where an eerie atmosphere lingered.



She immediately shook off those negative thoughts. Everyone had to be strong and follow the guidelines set by the authorities. It had already been more than one week since the Honourable Prime Minister had announced that a curfew was being imposed in a bid to stop the virus from spreading. The confinement period would last for at least two weeks, and after assessing the situation, the appropriate actions would be taken.

Under such circumstances, where fear prevailed, everyone had come together, *ene sel lepep ene sel nation* (as one people, as one nation), in order to fight against the disease. It was heart-warming to see people helping those in need and trying, at the same time, to follow the established rules. Those who deigned to openly ignore regulations that had been put in place were quickly brought to order by the police force.

Yuvaisha could not help feeling proud of the frontliners, who were risking their own lives to assist the population. She had to concede that it was a great privilege to be able to serve one's country selflessly, especially during tough times like these.

Just then, her mother came into the kitchen and reminded her that she had to take a shower. She had earlier planned to call her best friend, Nritka, but her visit to the hypermarket had taken up most of her time.

Her friend had injured her foot a few days ago and had been advised strict bed rest by her doctor. Unfortunately, Yuvaisha had not been able to pay her a visit due to the curfew, nor had she called her even once. She simply had not had the time. After all, there were several issues that she had to attend to.

She decided to call Nritka later. A shower was what she needed the most at that precise moment. It had been quite a while since she had walked such a long distance and, although she had enjoyed going to the hypermarket on foot, she was feeling very tired. So, off she went to the bathroom.

About half an hour later, she was lying down on the couch in the living room, feeling absolutely refreshed, when she spotted a new packet of masks on the coffee table. Almost immediately, she had a flashback. She had once watched a documentary about the 2009 swine flu pandemic and had made fun of the people wearing masks. Little did she know that, one day, she would find herself in the same situation. Her mum was right when she said that what goes around comes around.

She slowly began to doze off. All of a sudden, her cell phone rang loudly, completely startling her.

It was Nritka.

She quickly picked up the phone, worried about her friend. The latter had always led a busy life, juggling between her job as a nurse, studying for a master's degree and caring for her sick mother. She was not used to sitting idle. However, due to her injury, she was stuck at home.

Strangely, much to her surprise, Yuvaisha noticed that her friend sounded quite relaxed and cheerful. Nritka told her how she was feeling emotionally strong and optimistic. Not only did she believe that her foot would heal in due course, but she was also hopeful that, very soon, the COVID-19 would no longer be a threat to anyone. When asked about the secret to such a positive attitude, she calmly replied:

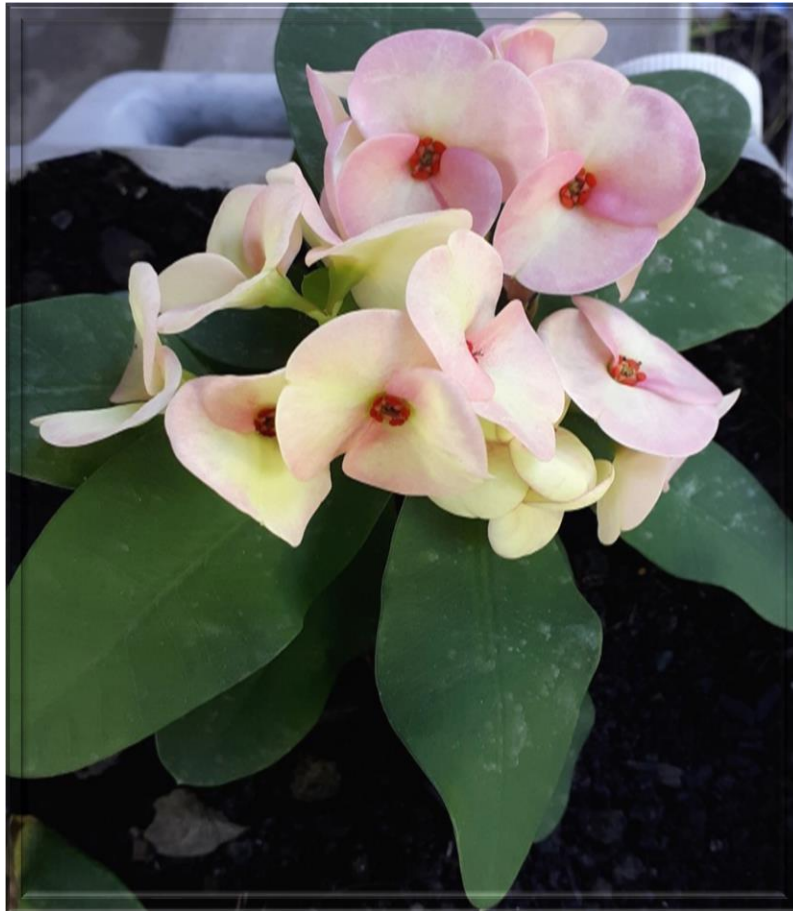
“I have caught a whiff of life. Just stop and breathe, you will understand what I mean.”

On that note, she hung up. Yuvaisha was quite taken aback by her friend’s words. What did she even mean by ‘a whiff of life’?

Moreover, to advise her to stop and breathe was sheer madness. Nritka knew very well that her plate was full to the brim. She was aiming for a promotion at work, she also had to pursue her doctorate and finally, travel the world.

While she was worrying about how to achieve her goals, a sweet fragrance reached her nose, breaking her reverie. Unable to stop herself, she rose from the couch, trying to find the source of such a pleasant smell.

A few minutes later, she found it. She stood in the garden, mesmerised by the sight in front of her.



Her mum had done a fantastic job. The garden was in full bloom. Yuvaisha bent down to smell one of the flowers. It gave off such a unique fragrance that she forgot all her worries. She just wanted to let go of herself and live in the moment.



The orchard, full of a variety of tropical fruits, beckoned her. She complied and was welcomed by a cool breeze. She took a deep breath and then slowly exhaled, feeling all the tension and stress leaving her body. It had been ages since she had last set foot here. She remembered her childhood days, when she would just go with the flow, taking one day at a time and playing hide-and-seek with her cousins in this orchard. How she wished she could go back in time and relive those memories!

Her attention was suddenly captivated by a particular tree, the Spanish tamarind tree, most commonly known as *vavangue* in her country. It was one of her favourite fruits. She rushed to the tree, admiring its beauty and wondering how she had not noticed its presence before.



The answer was simple. In spite of her mother's pleas, she had never had the time to visit the orchard. She felt a pang of regret. She sat on a rock under the lychee tree, revelling in the serene atmosphere and breathing deeply the unpolluted air.

At that exact moment, Yuvaisha was forced to admit that she had indeed missed so much in life. She had completely ignored the gem that now lay before her, the gem that would have given her what she craved the most: peace of mind. She felt as if life was giving her another chance. The confinement period was proving to be beneficial for her in more ways than one.

Her attention drifted to a post on a popular social media platform. It urged human beings to appreciate and respect their surroundings. We may have taken control of the whole planet and its resources, but we would never be able to overpower nature. Instead, we had been brought down to our knees by an organism that we could not even see without the help of microscopes. The COVID-19 had, thus, taught everyone an important lesson.

Her wandering mind was pulled back to the present moment by the soothing melody of birds merrily singing. Her mum was feeding them, a big smile on her face. The sun was about to set and she noticed her mother's shadow on one of the trees.



The moment could not have been more magical. Her life would no longer be the same. At last, she understood what her friend had meant. Yuvaisha had eventually caught *a whiff of life*, albeit an *unusual* one.

