

# The Girl, The Ghost And The Wooden Ruler

Aparna Das MD\*

I still remember that night. I was about 4 years old. I was not able to sleep as I was missing my mom. My mummy, who is an anesthesiologist, was at the hospital for her overnight call. Back then in India, few people even had a landline and we were not amongst them. So there was no way I could talk to my mummy over the phone and feel a little better. I went to my papa and told him that I was missing mom a lot. To distract me and to cheer me up, he started telling me some bedtime stories. I was enjoying the stories but for some reason was still not able to sleep. While he continued to coax and cajole me to go to sleep reminding me about school in the morning, we heard the doorbell ring. It was almost midnight! We both looked at each other with big wide eyes wondering who it could be at that hour. We used to live in the hospital campus apartments, the hospital where my papa was working as a general surgeon (my mummy worked at a different hospital). My papa opened the door and some distressed and anxious hospital staff member was standing at the door, rambling about a patient who was doing poorly and requesting my papa to come to the hospital to attend to them. It was surprising for him and terrifying for me. He was surprised because he had not expected unplanned emergency call from the hospital. I was terrified because I knew dad would go and my fears about "the ghost" started haunting me. While my papa tried to explain the situation to me, I started to express my great concern and fears about "the ghost" and the following conversation ensued:

Me: Papa, please don't go!

Papa: The patient needs me, I need to go. There is no other doctor there. I know we did not plan this, but it is really important for me to go to the hospital right now.

Me: I understand but I am scared!

Papa: Why?

Me: The ghost will be here when you are gone!

Papa: Hmmm... Ghost... what ghost? From where is it going to come?

Me: From the refrigerator!

Papa: And who told you that?

---

\* Aparna Das MD  
Orlando, USA



**Me:** She told me (pointing towards my older sister who I knew would not retaliate for being blamed as she was sleeping, blissfully unaware of what was going on). As my dad looked at me skeptically and arched an eyebrow, I added "...and I also saw it on the TV show" (to bolster my case).

**Papa:** Have you seen it in the house?

**Me:** No.

**Papa:** I have never seen any ghost either. And why do think a ghost will come out of the refrigerator? Refrigerator houses fruits, milk, vegetables and it has no space for any ghost. There is no ghost I have ever seen coming out of the refrigerator any night that I am in the house.

**Me:** It does not come out because it is afraid of you and mom, but it will be here when you are gone.

**Papa:** How does the ghost know that I will be going to the hospital and that mom is out too?

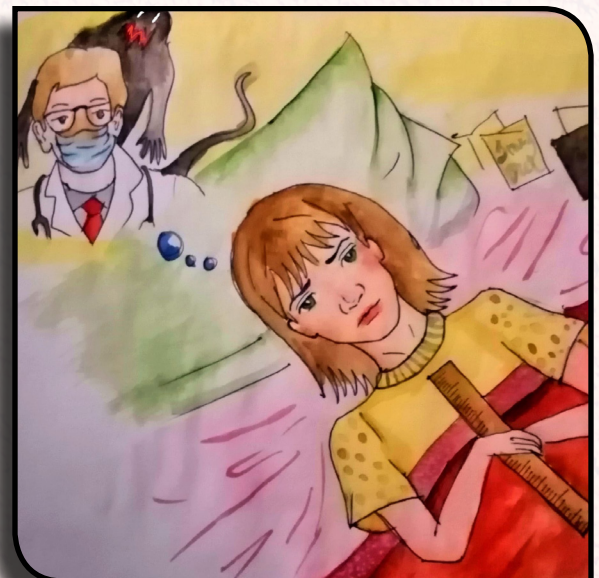
**Me:** I don't know... I think the ghost knows everything.

**Papa:** Okay, you wake up your sister if you see one.

**Me:** She is sleeping and it would be difficult to wake her up. She does not wake up easily.

The clock was ticking and my papa was losing precious moments futilely arguing with me trying to convince me that there was no such thing as a ghost. He quickly went to another room while I continued to lie in the bed, looking at the ceiling, fan and the light bulb, thinking about the ghost and desperately thinking of how to make my dad change his mind. As a last-ditch effort to stop him from leaving, I started crying, "Papa, don't go... ghost will be here... and my sister is also sleeping... who will save me?"

My papa, however, was already dressed in his hospital scrubs and determined to save the patient at any cost. He hugged me and handed me a 24 inch wooden ruler. He looked into my eyes and firmly said, "You are my brave girl. Aren't you? Hold his ruler and if you see any ghost, scare it away with the ruler and if needed hit it as hard as you can. It will get scared and go back





to wherever it came from. Okay? Now I have to go and I will be back soon. Try to go to sleep, you have school tomorrow.” I reluctantly agreed and my papa left.



I saw my sister sleeping peacefully next to me as I was awake holding the ruler as tightly as possible ready to leap into action, if the need arose. I felt tired but as soon as I would try to doze off, the regular whirring noise of the refrigerator would wake me up, alerting me about the possibility of the ghost stepping out of the fridge and making its next move. My mind kept on bubbling with a million ideas, thinking about my next plan of action to tackle the ghost and take it down. I kept my head on a swivel, scanning the room for possible entry points.

After what felt like an eternity, I heard the

door lock open. It was almost 2 AM and I was so happy to see my papa who was back from the hospital. He was very surprised to see me still awake clutching the ruler in my little hands. He had expected that I would be sound asleep but there I was like a loyal and dedicated knight, guarding the apartment like a castle and my sister and myself with my only weapon, a 24 inch wooden ruler, ready to take down the imaginary ghost, no matter its size.

Papa: You're still awake? Did you see any ghost?

Me: No.

Papa: So will you be worried again?

Me: I guess not (smiling with a sense of victory).

Papa: Now go to sleep, you need to get some rest before I wake you up from school in a few hours

Me: Okay!

I put the ruler down and went to sleep. Next day when my mummy was back from work, my papa recounted this incident and praised me for my courage.

Looking back, when I think about it I have a hearty laugh, but on a more serious note I feel that this incident left an indelible mark in my mind. I am sure it must have been nerve-wracking for my papa at the time as the situation was totally unanticipated-



my mummy being out, my older sister in deep slumber, I refusing to fall asleep that night, unplanned emergency call and no babysitter available. He made a judgement call and decided to do what he felt was the best in that situation, fulfilling his duty to his patient and having faith and courage that all will be well at home while he is gone. It was stressful for me because of my unfounded fears, but the faith and confidence instilled in me by my papa helped me to stay put and deal with the situation that night and at the end we both were happy and everything turned out well.

In life, we are all faced with challenging situations, some predictable and expected, some totally unforeseen which throw us off guard. Some battles are easy while some hurdles seem insurmountable that try to shake and break us. Sometimes all that is needed is a little courage, patience and an unflinching faith in ourselves to help us keep moving and keep going.

□□□□

