

Growing up Pains



‘Life is hard, I tell myself, as I stand before the mirror and watch acne, that dreaded scum of a disease, playing havoc with my face. I wish I could drive the pimples out with a wave of the hand. Then I tell myself that acne is a temporary ravage that makes life a little less comfortable for a teenager. But it is a sure sign of a child moulting into an adult.

“Life is tough,” I turn away from the mirror, when it strikes me like a bolt of lightning. My voice has turned rough, almost raucous. It grates, if I may add. Where has my sweet, soft voice gone ? Have I caught a cold? Such gruffness goes hand in hand with a cold. But, the common cold and I have nothing to do with each other, at least at this moment. ‘Is there an uncommon cold?’ a light banter lifts my spirits. A common cold is common to all mankind. But every time I catch a cold, it becomes an uncommon one for *Appa* and *Amma*. They think I have come down with a dangerous cold, one that could kill. They force me into bed, send for the doctor who pumps all sorts of medicines into my system.

When I tease them for being over-protective, they grunt, “How would you know? You are too young to understand our fears. Our only child, the apple of our eye.”

As if they understand my fears !

I too have my fear. It was not there till the other day. But, suddenly, out of nowhere, it has appeared. It fills all my waking thoughts and haunts my dreams too. I try to dispel the fear, I tell myself, ‘Only cowards fear, I am no coward.’ But this bravado doesn’t last long.

The more I think of it, the stronger becomes the hold of this fear. I am no longer my usual self. I have become a stranger to myself.

Till the other day, I used to feel happy when *Amma* walked in unannounced, surveyed the room, gently chided me, “Is this a room or a pigsty?” and quickly got down to the task of cleaning the room. She would work at it with total dedication. The books would go back into the bookcase or side rack; the caps and pens, pulled apart by me, would get reunited; bits and pieces of crayons that dot the floor would go into the bin; the dust would be swept off the table and the room would gain a fresh look.

How I hate her now when she does that !

I have put up a warning on the door :

Knock Before You Enter.

Beneath the above instruction is a warning.

My Room! Love It Or Hate It !

Amma sees the notice but behaves as if it is Greek or Latin, she continues to step into my room, unmindful of my privacy.

How can I make her understand that I need privacy? If only she senses the gossamer-thin curtain that has come up between me and my parents! Is this what growing up is all about a matter of individuality, a snapping of bonds ?

Who wants to snap bonds with one's parents? Not I, the very thought makes me cry, yet, I feel I am drawing away from them.

Or am I imagining! I think *Appa* is watchful and wary when he meets me. Of course, his eyes gleam with joy whenever I walk into his presence. But is it as spontaneous as it used to be? Or am I unable to feel its warmth because of the curtain that has come up between us. May be, because of the curtain, he sees me as someone different, a rather misty figure, imprecise, vague and elusive, developing a form that is difficult for him to gauge. May be, he too is scared of this new figure.

Is that why, at times, he makes extra efforts to be overtly affectionate! I do not know. May be he tries to kill the fear in him by treating me with caution. He finds safety in treating me as a child. He runs his fingers through my thick, curly hair, holds my head close to his chest and pats me.

I would not say I hate him for doing that. But I am not able to enjoy it as I used to. Once, I would give the whole world for being held lovingly by *Appa*. Now I feel as if it is not what *Appa* should do to me. Is it not time, I tell myself, that he treats me as a grown-up, especially when he has been reminding me to behave like one.

I fall and slip and scream with pain because of a sprain. *Amma* is all kindness, Not *Appa*. He growls, "You are fourteen, Samir. It is time you learnt how to bear pain with stoic courage. You are no longer a child."

I cannot forget those words.

Next evening, before *Appa* has returned from office, I walk up to *Amma*. She welcomes me with a big smile. But the smile turns into a frown when I ask her whether I could go for a party at Vishal's house. *Amma* says, "Must be back before nine."

"*Amma*, I am grown-up now. Can I not stay out till all my friends leave?" I ask.

"You think you are old enough to be on your own, Samir? Remember you are still a child even though you think otherwise. You are at an in-between age. A Teenager,"

That raises my hackles. I stamp my feet, shout at her, "I am old enough, *Amma*. Old enough to be on my own, I will not allow myself to be treated like a kid !"

She gives me a stern look and asserts firmly, "My decision is final. No party for you, not today, not ever, I do not want you to end up as a wild colt."

She has her way. I miss the party. But it does not endear her. I sulk, I do not talk to her for a whole day, She coaxes me, placates me till I succumb to her molly-coddling. Then I hug her and cry. Pat comes her remark, “At fourteen, a boy must know how to control his emotions !”

That is the trouble. Am I a child? Or have I grown up? When will my parents see clearly what I am. Either I am a child or I am a grown-up. I cannot be both at the same time. May be I am a mix of both, I do not know. That is what makes my fear so scary.

I know my fear will die if my parents stop treating me like a child. But no. They will not do that. They have their fears, that is why *Amma* says every time I try to assert myself, “At your age, you need to be kept on the leash. It is for your good, Samir. We shall take the leash off once you are capable of knowing what is right and what is wrong. Freedom never comes in a day. Freedom will be yours once we feel you are mature enough to handle situations.”

“When will that be?” I ask.

Appa walks in. *Amma* warms up to his presence with a gentle nod, then tells me, “Samir, everything takes time. A flower takes time to turn into a fruit. It takes a year for you to go from one class to the next” she grins.

Appa caresses my arm and says. “I know you have your fears. We have ours, we must fight our fears together. You must understand our concerns. There are so many temptations to which a youth is drawn. I do not want to list them. You know them now, come to us, talk to us openly, let us learn to be friends, take every advice we offer as coming from true friends. We, in turn, promise to do all that we can to appreciate your view point. Will you let me be your true friend?”

“Me too,” *Amma* lifts my chin and smiles into my eyes.

I press her palm and grin happily, “We are three friends, bound by love, We will never do anything that hurts the others.”

“That’s it! We are happy now, we have been set free, from fear”. *Appa* gently ruffles my curly hair.

- R.K. MURTHI

About the Author :

R.K. Murthi is a leading Indian writer effectively serving the cause of children's literature. He has authored over fifty books. He is also a recipient of several awards.

About the Story :

'Growing up Pains' is the story of a teenaged boy Samir. The story depicts the conflict between parents and their children. This is the age when parents become extra-watchful. Whereas, on the other side a teenager needs extra space in his life to live in his own way and wants to take decisions independently.

Glossary

acne	-	a skin disease with red pimples on the face
havoc	-	to damage, to devastate
ravage	-	to destroy
moulting	-	the shedding of skin
raucous	-	harsh and rough sounding
gruffness	-	harshness, roughness in voice
banter	-	to make teasing remarks
dispel	-	to scatter
chide	-	to scold, to rebuke
scare	-	to terrify, to frighten
overtly	-	apparently
hackless	-	a feeling of anger
coaxes	-	entices, persuades
leash	-	to bring under control
caress	-	to touch or kiss lovingly

COMPREHENSION

(A) Tick the correct alternative :

- What is the sign of a child moulting into an adult ?
(a) sprain (b) acne
(c) fever (d) smallpox

2. What was the warning written by Samir on the door of his room?
 (a) beware of dogs (b) do not disturb
 (c) knock the door (d) knock before you enter
3. How old was Samir?
 (a) fourteen years (b) fifteen years
 (c) sixteen years (d) seventeen years

(B) State whether the statements given below are True (T) or False (F) :

1. A common cold is the common disease. []
2. Samir does not want privacy. []
3. Amma falls and screams with pain. []
4. Samir did not talk to his mother for a whole day. []
5. A flower takes time to turn into a fruit. []

(C) Answer the following questions in 20-25 words each :

1. What was Samir's opinion about the change in his voice ?
2. How did Samir try to dispel the fear ?
3. What did Samir's mother say about his room ?
4. Why did Samir put up a warning on the door ?
5. How did Samir feel when he did not talk to his mother for a whole day ?
6. What was the opinion of Samir's mother about freedom ?

(D) Answer the following questions in 30-40 words each :

1. Why was Samir worried about the acne on his face?
2. When did Samir's parents grunt and what did they say ?
3. How did Samir's mother react when he fell and slipped?
4. Why did Samir stamp his feet ?
5. What do you think about freedom in teenage ?

(E) Answer the following questions in 60-80 words each :

1. Why were Samir's parents over protective ?

2. “Growing up is all about a matter of individuality” Discuss.

3. What made Samir sulk ?

ACTIVITY :

Like Samir you are also having conflict with your parents. Share your views with your classmates and try to find out solutions.
