

They Say Getting Old is Not for Sissies

By Tara Prakash - Chevy Chase, MD

but what about the people sitting by the hospital bed, the people waiting for the hospital bed to be delivered to the house. See, I just returned from three months in Nepal and walking from the airport baggage claim to our car in the parking lot, I learned that my grandfather has a catheter in his penis because he hasn't peed

in six days. And the first few days home, I was in bed with a stomach bug, bacteria I'd picked up at Kathmandu Burger or some other street food place, and my grandmother kept calling me asking to see me. "Dadi, I'm sick. I don't want to get you sick," I kept saying,

and she kept calling back with the same request, because she has dementia and Alzheimer's

and how can you blame a woman with dementia and Alzheimer's? And I'm tired of telling her the same thing again and again, but she is the one who is in a rehab center, who sleeps in the cold because they won't turn up the heat, who thinks there are mice all over her feet and keeps asking the nurse to get the mice off her, and yesterday evening after waiting all day at my grandmother's

home for the hospital bed to be delivered, my dad told me he sat on the kitchen carpet and cried

and he only ever cried when watching *Where the Red Fern Grows*, and I know getting old is not for sissies, but watching your parents get old is not for sissies either, and watching your parents watch their parents get old is not for sissies either. My point is none of it is for sissies,

and when I'm feeling better and am no longer contagious, I visit my grandmother in her rehab center, and I sit in the chair by her bed and she is squirming and twisting her ankles underneath the thin sheets and "I'll get the mice off of you," I say, I keep saying. "We'll get the mice off of you."