

THE WHEELCHAIR

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(I posted this blog four years ago, December 2017, eleven months after my wife announced beyond recall, â??Iâ??m done with this cancer, I canâ??t fight anymore,â?• and she left, leaving all the relationships behind, never to wake up. But â??the wheelchairâ?• her walking partner couldnâ??t reconcile and engaged in a soliloquy recalling some best moments with her. Read the edited and revised essay.)

Left alone, I got pretty miffed by the helpless thoughts of abandonment that got me choked as if Iâ??m a sugar candy attacked by an army of ants. I felt enfeebled, cast aside at one end of the long corridor. Iâ??m the â??wheelchairâ?? and quite distressed to share that my utility had come to a tragic end a few months back. Let me tell you about the foyer â?? a therapeutic open space â?? a relaxing preserve of my madam â?? the lady of the house and the principal of a well-established school. I wheeled her along, both mornings and evenings, what she used to call itâ??s her â??calm downtimeâ??. Itâ??s a rectangular, long cozy space that lured rich daylight, a rush of comforting breeze. The generous hallway with its multiple windows watching over the family-owned school buildings and playground spread two floors below. Behind me, they converted a hall into a nursing room that received doctors, nurses, and caretakers as and when my madamâ??s health implied critical.

They brought me in to facilitate her mobility. The moment I arrived, I noticed first that each of her lower part of legs fastened tight with cotton and strapped with gauze to contain the swelling â?? painful fallout of the malignancy that had eaten into her left femur bone. When I saw her sunk on the hospital bed vulnerably before me, I recognized her smile-filled eyes as if reaching out a message, â??nice that you are here; Iâ??ll be able to heal quickly.â?• Then she felt me with her hand; I saw the dark marks all over her wrist â?? hints of needle stabs that pumped in medicines and fluids.

From then on, I emerged as her caretaker. I gave her those precious movements to ride and roll, and in the meantime, I have developed a magical intimacy with her for over the eighteen months before she breathed her last. Within this brief space, I went on â?? removed the sadness from her chest that she doesnâ??t have a chance to walk, rallied her with optimism that she has a choice to soar in full sunshine. I assumed, â??My, what a pretty girl she is, how badly she suffers, let I will be of some help to her, like a dutiful calling, Iâ??ll care for herâ?• some nourishing sentiments got fired in me. I played

the part as a devoted escort and started filling her days with refreshing air and poise to relax. She came alive glowing in that ramble of freedom and never allowed the morning sunlight to go waived. In the days that followed, I knew how much she reserved her emotions â?? the torment of that uncooperative feet rendered indignity to her beautiful soul shining persona â?? a sense of calmness anchored over the years. Itâ??s evident, soon I realised, beneath her smiles, an unspeakable disease of fatal intensity lurked that rapidly overwhelmed her biological functions.

Iâ??m happy in this helpful connection â?? a fine way to ease her vulnerability. Where I took up the task to lessen the distress of being inert and dependent, which restored her rhythm and let her fewer the winks of fear and anxiety. In all the efforts I had assisted her â?? the random trips she got involved in herself, I observed, had given her an ocean of peace, smiles reflective of inner tranquility, as if her soul had been inviting self-healing vibes. In those moments of her joy, a pleasant sentiment flew out â?? coursed along my frame, â??Iâ??m glad Iâ??m there to her.â?• I promised myself â?? an oath of thousand hopes.

I used to pick up a few questions she often asked her husband: â??Can you think, can I make it, I can walk again.â?• It seemed curious when her sing-song voice still carried hope and will. And she â??walkedâ?? without pain as treacherous cancer claimed her. She walked away from me, devoured from the corridors where we shared the sunshine and sunsets, from the home she dearly adored for over three and a half decades, from all our lives. She departed, as casually as one goes to a mall, drifted away into darkened silence, in frantic suddenness, â??walkedâ?? away; breathed away â?? forever!

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A depressive gloom hung all over the house. The nursing room where I witnessed her gotten treated, examined, consoled, and humored, now empty and shocked to silence; perhaps it may take months to crawl back to normalcy.

I counted the passing days and nights; nothing else to do, emptiness crept into every nut and bolt of my body that felt rusted and lame. Hit by the loss, untouched, my hopelessness compelled me to deduce that I was to remain as a mere memory of the frame without the lively presence of her. There was nagging strife that coursed through the thin, tired wheels eroding loudly, â??Iâ??m not needed anymore, will I remain in one corner,â?• like a discarded dustbin.

But it didnâ??t happen as I had errantly imagined. â??Iâ??m looked after every day, oh lucky meâ?• Iâ??m grateful to the old maid â?? madamâ??s devoted caregiver â?? with a shock of white hair, the dutiful domestic help, I was told she took up the responsibility in the house thirty years back. I received the attendance first thing in the morning as she dusted and cleaned me and set the cushions, towels, napkins right. â??What a thoughtful servitude she had displayed to her landlady, I never parted from all the pieces, and stuff belonged to her.â?• Henceforth, I gladly lulled myself riding on the waves of memories of the graceful departed soul.

â??Open all the doors and windows walk me out, let me breath a while in morning Sun,â?• were an unmissable hymn of her words and routine every day. The orders: the entire household dutifully followed. I saw the nurse helped her plop on the cushions, her bandaged feet placed on the footrest; there I go, to celebrate the early sunshine and slow breeze rippling along the corridor. I watched her penetrating, ever questioning eyes. I wear a pious veneer and then whispered a silent prayer, â??donâ??t let the smile fade away, donâ??t take away her from us.â?• And I added, â??How lucky Iâ??m to have her in my life?â?•

On some days, her son took her around in the evenings; she let herself moved close to the parapet wall â?? a spot she loved most. I found she just gazed upon, as if collecting herself, the bearings of the ongoing battle, as she watched and listened to the noisy road below. She always longed and pleaded, â??Will I be able to walk around like everyone; Iâ??m fed up with this wheelchair.â?• Stifling emotions, gulping down the grief were the muffled answers; thatâ??s all she got. I believed she was wise enough to read behind the mask of dark helplessness of her son: too young, not an age to sustain the imminent tragedy to handle. Her grace, her breath; her liveliness seemed slowly fading and melting â?? as if getting ready for the heaven-bound retreat. Seeing the bustling urgency of the doctors, the tired face of her husband, I apprehended â?? foreshadow of an ominous emptiness that would soon ravage the house: a fate we see when struck by a thunderbolt and a flood all in one go.

I grew fond of the madamâ??s laughter, and it turned so magical when she caressed Aradhya, her granddaughter, on her lap and played around. Itâ??s the three-year-old little sparkling who weaved the loving bond and the little oneâ??s presence, and it appeared, had given her an imperceptible resolve to take head-on, to battle â?? the illness, hard and tough â?? the savage curse thatâ??s been harassing her vulnerable family members.

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Aradhya tolling her innocent giggles, I found her soft pinkish feet on my foothold and then gripped the hand-rest with her tiny fingers, beaming all her smiles goaded me to move on. What a pleasant sight to behold? The way she peeped into her grandmotherâ??s pampering eyes. Occasionally, she rested her head in her grandmaâ??s lap as if to receive the warmth of her blessings.

I fondled the pure peace she felt holding Aradhya and stowed her in the wheelchair; thatâ??s me; how I wished may these pleasing frames of tenderness frozen securely for eternity. However hard I tried not to, these family portraits reeled before me every day. Though I have bonded with her family for a brief period, now, Iâ??m considered an enduring icon, in gratefulness, that I had carefully nurtured madam in her hardest times. I reconciled myself to remain a divine empty frame without a deity; looking at the quiet, empty rooms, and grieved myself: can I ever see the happiness bloom again in this home?

On some days, I have noticed her husband settled on a small sofa arranged next to me that let me conclude, â??How punishably I see him left alone,â?• seen reading a book or leafing through a newspaper.

As days went on, her husband, too, I reckoned, coped in the way I have endured. Though I think itâ??s an impossible challenge to fight, the void faced every waking moment. Perhaps, as of now, I presumed, he got used to â??Iâ??m on my own sort of situation.â?? I found him to confront the actuality of the harsh truth with dignity when I watched his intent face and determined fingers nudging the keyboard in late evenings, after work, jotting down the memories â?? of his wife â?? Mani.

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1. Uncategorized

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