

Resuscitation

It was a warm sunny day. The sun paced amidst the cotton candy clouds. A swift breeze bounced on the car's hood as it cut through the streets pulling its tail end through a hard curve.

Behind the wheels, he remembered the first time he had pulled a hard corner in his car. It had ended up hitting the old banyan tree in front of the temple near his house. His father was with him that day too.

After the collision, the airbags diffused. He saw the crowd gathering around the smoke coming from the hood. In the mild consciousness that he regained, the crowd's murmur reached his ears "God saved him, it was a miracle".

"Airbags" he murmured under his breath. Now, he turned with ease through the turns. It has been years since that collision and never has he repeated that again.

Rakul recognized the purple-colored gate for yet another visit. He stopped in front of the closed barrier and alighted his car. Walking up to the gate, he leaned into the lawn for a moment and slid the gate open to the sides.

The wide driveway filled with fallen brown leaves welcomed his footsteps once again. As he walked back to the car, he thought about how his driveway at home was cleaner. His father would clean it as the ex-bank manager had little to do anything after his retirement.

Parts of the sunshine roaming in the garden rushed into the house as the wooden door opened. A set of eyes, confused, welcomed the guest into the living room. With a strong build and soggy eyelids, the man of the house joined his palms together as he guided them to the sofa.

Wrapped in his lungi, the man seemed to have had very little sleep as his eyelids were soggy as a sachet or a teabag. Also, his eyes seemed confused as if the family had not expected no one to visit, no one at all.

The elders sat facing each other and the young man between next to both the old couples. They were silent for a couple of minutes. The bewildered housewife was the one to break the abrupt silence.

"May we know why you have come now? she spoke. Rakul's father was in confusion with the usage of the phrase 'now'. He understood they were not expected, but he was sure they came at a usually accepted time of visit.

"Aunty, it was my idea to visit" his son's voice disturbed the old man's thoughts that had wandered off in the small unkempt hall that they sat in. Rakul continued " They are my parents and I wanted them to meet Krish, Krishnaveni".

At the last remark of their daughter, the built-up smile in both the host's face dimmed down a notch. "I don't think it is a good time to see her, though" The lady revoked that request. "And it has only been three months since..." the householder left his sentence unfinished.

"Since what?" Rakul's father was growing tired of all the suspense. "What happened son, what is happening here?" he pressed upon his son.

"She was..." the young man fumbled with his words. "She was raped, three months ago." he stopped grinding his teeth. The girl's mother could not suppress her pain, a painful moan reverberated through the hall. The father was crying with quieter sobs. Silence began to spread all over the room, harsh like the summer wind.

Quietness in the room broke as a pair of weak legs ascended the stairs to the hall. She was wearing a full sleeve top. Her eyes were soggy and dark. Her face seemed plumped in red. Bruises here and there indicated the brutality of the incident.

He stood up at her sight. He stood confused about whether to go near her or not. Meanwhile, his parents also rose, but to leave. "Son, I think we need to leave. We will talk about this at home first." he sounded in a hurry.

"No dad, it has to wrap out here in front of her." His son retaliated as his eyes went back to the fresh wounds standing across the room.

"You don't have to do this, Rakul, please." a feeble sound emerged through the ruptured lips. He moved a step closer and replied "I am not doing this out of sympathy, Krish. It has always been you and always will be. You know that, right?". His voice was slow and steady.

"But things have changed, Rakul" Her instant blunt reply didn't kill his enthusiasm. He spoke back without even thinking much "Nothing has changed for me, nothing".

Both parents were listening to the exchange of words. Neither of the old couples could take part in it though. The air around them was intense yet still.

Rakul's father inched closer to his son and whispered in the latter's ears "Son, you are making a mistake. Let us talk outside. " But the young man didn't move at all.

"Why dad? Why not her? Give me one good reason why I should not marry her." He turned towards his sweating father. The conversation was getting intense word by word.

His father responded after taking a breath "She is...you don't understand. What will others tell, our relatives, neighbors, etc, just think about it." The old man was running out of words as the conversation was tightening its grip.

"So what dad?. She didn't do anything wrong. I didn't. Then why should we worry" he replied with more questions in a confused tone. He continued, "Do you know this phrase has killed many dreams?"

"The useless thought of what others think when all they do is to ponder over the gossip until another one comes along. If we could see past that, dad, I am sure many lives would have been happier, many would have lived instead of staying alive".

The boy's parents were getting more uncomfortable each second. With time, they started to forget the presence of the girl in the room. For them, their son's life was more important, his future was at stake, according to them.

The father inched closer to his son and spoke. He said "Son, she is not a virgin anymore. How can you deal with that? We live in a culture that does not accept that. Do you even know what people will talk behind your back?" He let out everything he was holding back.

"I don't get it, dad. So, if I am not a virgin, does that mean I will never get married at all?". It was another array of question marks from the young man.

"No. You are a boy," the father responded immediately and bit his tongue as the words left his mouth. He knew he couldn't take that back.

"So, boys can be non-virgin but when a girl is not a virgin then she is an outcast? Who made these rules, dad? How is it any different from a boy's condition?" he paused his questions, took a deep breath and continued "Even so, she didn't sleep with someone."

"She is a victim of rape. These men..." he said stressing his words a bit "...they should understand that when a girl says no to touching her, it is a no. No means no." his voice level rose after each sentence. His rage filled his eyes with tears. "And dad, who said a girl's sanctity lies at her vagina?" he continued.

"Rakul!" his mother who stayed silent so far intruded into the conversation "Is this how you talk to your father?". The husband himself stopped her. The old man was starting to understand his mistakes. His frown was turning into a painful stare.

In the meantime, the hosts were listening to the exchange between the guests. They glanced at each other and the old couple found their daughter's half-opened eyes fixed at the young man. Her eyes gleamed with pain and happiness, both at once.

"Dad, a girl's purity lies in her heart, her character, the way she treats others, same as for every human being," the young man continued his plea. "Our culture is so messed up that we believe marrying is just to have sex and make babies." his words were becoming sharper.

"Yeah, you ask a boy what comes to his mind when he/she thinks about marriage. He will reply either about the first night or the honeymoon" he paused with his hands raised in the air, confused. He continued "The idea of marriage is to support one another and grow with each other. It's about making each other's dreams come true, together."

"Mom, Dad, I love her. She does too. I am sure she will care for me, for us. I don't care if she is not a virgin. I don't care what others will talk behind my back. I don't. The only thing I care about, no what we care for is your blessings" he addressed both the parents as he spoke. "Please..." his words went untouched in the hall.

After a few minutes of struggling silence, his father walked up to Krishna, wrapped in her mother's hold. He stopped a few steps in front of her and joined his palms, and said: "I'm sorry, really sorry". She shook her head sideways and tried hard to pull a smile.

Across the hall, Rakul's head fell down. He stood exhausted but still continued his plea as his parents moved towards the door. "It's okay, Rakul. Don't force them" the girl tried to calm him of his grievance.

"Rakul, Are you coming?" a voice enumerated from the doorsteps. Krishna's parents intervened this time "You should leave son. We appreciate that you have stood for our daughter. But your parents will have to worry about your future. You cannot blame them. Please, leave"

"Come Rakul, we need to go" his father hurried "we need to go and see the astrologer and mark a good day for the wedding. Later we will come with our family for a proper proposal." he said without looking into the hall.

It was Rakul who had the first cheer and then Krishna joined him a few seconds later with tears of joy. Both of them now turned their gaze towards Krishna's parents.

"We will be happy to have you as our son-in-law. We know that she is in good hands" the householder replied to the unaired question. They later thanked the couples at the doorsteps by joining their palms.

"Thank you dad" Rakul raced to the doorsteps embracing his father. "Nearly fifty years of my life had passed and I am not half the human you are now, son. We are proud of you.". He said pulling his wife into the hug.

Another leaf withered off onto the driveway as they left. Through the opened door, light entered the distressed family's home and life. Even the bruised face in that house managed to make a curve around the lips.

As the car left the driveway, the girl stepped out of the home for the first time in a long time. Her eyes blinked, adjusting to the bright sunlight that caressed her cheeks and wounds. Inside the car, he adjusted the rearview mirror to catch her reflection, her freedom, her resuscitation.

Once again, the hood of the car took a curve.