

The day the sun failed to rise

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It was my moment. The ball was placed on the penalty spot. The striker looked across at me, a determined look on her face. Her eyes darted across the goal, as if searching for her target. She stepped a few paces back, ready for her run. I crouched, my feet shoulder width apart, balancing myself on the balls of my feet. My hands were stretched to both sides, trying to cover as much of the goal mouth as I could. The referee looked at me and asked, "Ready?". I nodded, my eyes riveted on the ball in front of me. He blew his whistle. The girl ran up and kicked the ball, her foot smashing into it with a sense of finality. I kept my eyes trained on the ball and jumped to the left, following its progress. I managed to just get my fingers onto the ball, sending it whirling away and then I slammed into the ground. The stands were in pandemonium. We had just won the finals of the national championships. My team mates ran and jumped onto me in a group hug. The whole thing was so surreal!

Still in an ecstatic mood, I was driving back home with my family. The car was filled with our excited conversation, voices raised as we remembered snippets of the match. Suddenly there was a crashing sound and we were flung from our seats. The car was spinning out of control. I went flying and then I felt a sharp pain all over my face and everything went dark.

I woke up to humming noises, not knowing where I was. I tried to rise but someone pushed me down gently. My Mom said in a soft voice, "Just rest". I tried to open my eyes to see her, but I couldn't.

"Mom," I said panicking, "why can't I open my eyes? What's happening to me?"

Mom sighed and said sadly, "I don't want to be the one to tell you this but you are in the hospital because..." Then she started to stutter and cry.

"Because of what? Because of the accident?" I said, "But I know that."

"The part you don't know," she said through sobs, "is that everyone else was discharged, but you were kept back because you were hurt more than the others." She took in a shaky breath and continued, "The glass from the windows cut into your eyes."

"So what are they going to do to fix it?", I asked, suddenly a bit scared.

"No," she said even more sadly, "the glass destroyed your eyes."

“Can’t they give me eyes from donors?” I said hopefully, “They do that don’t they?”

“Your optical nerves were also cut.” She sobbed, “The doctors are still trying to take out the glass shards.”

I lay there too shocked to speak, as I heard my Mom get ushered out and some other people come in.

“How are you doing?” asked a male voice, “I’m your doctor”. His voice carried a hint of sadness, remorse, a certain hesitancy, an unspoken emotion that did not do the tragedy justice.

“I bet you’ve said that to lots of people haven’t you?” I retorted in a soft yet angry voice.

“I admit I have,” he said in an even tone, “even to people in dire situations.”

“Oh!” I said my voice getting softer, “so you’ve also gone up to a dying person and asked them how they were doing?”

“Yes, I have,” he replied bluntly, probably trying to end this thread of conversation as quickly as he could.

He paused for an instant and then continued “We have tried everything, but there is nothing we can do to get your sight back”. He let out a huge sigh. “ You will have to come to terms with this situation. You have your life ahead of you, and you can make it fulfilling even with this handicap” he finished.

I heard his steps recede as he left. I heard a click as the lights, probably in my room, were switched off. I was not sure of anything any more. Was it day or night, how long had I been here, would I ever get used to being blind, and oh! God! how could my team manage without me standing at the goal, how would I ever read a book again, watch TV... I stared into the oblivion of nothingness since that was all I could or would ever see. A black nothingness swirled around me making me dizzy. I covered my face with my hands and sobbed, letting out every bit of emotion I had. Sadness, despair and above all anger. Why was it me who had gone blind, why couldn’t I have gotten out of that car accident with just a small scratch like everyone else?

It was a few days later. I must have dozed off because I woke up to the hubbub of whispering. As I pushed myself up I heard the noise in the room die down to such a level that the silence was deafening. It enveloped me, entered every pore in my body, like it was trying to smother me. I was just left with myself and the gentle breathing of the people around me. I broke the silence by asking, “ So, when am I going home?”

The reply came from my mother, "You should be leaving here and coming back home this afternoon."

"So it's morning then," I replied, trying to be nonchalant.

"Yes," she said in an artificially bright tone, "a beautiful day, with a beautiful sun, filled with new prospects for everyone, especially you."

"What are you talking about?" I replied, my voice clenched in frustration, "That car ride cost me my sight, now I can't play football. Football was my life, that car crash cost me my life, you think that all of this can be put behind. The only thing I ever loved was football now it's gone." I started to cry, but I steeled my nerves and kept on going, " Maybe the sun rose with all its luck and happiness for you all but for me I woke up to darkness, darkness I can never escape, I will never escape. Maybe the sun rose for you, but for me this day, the sun failed to rise." I turned my face and sobbed into the pillow - I was done talking.

I let out a long breath taking in all that I had said. Did I mean everything I said? Would I be left in the darkness forever? Will the sun never rise for me? I had just been talking then, on a roll, carried away by my emotions but maybe I was right, maybe I would never get used to this. I let my sadness and sorrow envelope me and I drifted off to a dark, dreary slumber.

I drifted out of my sleep to loud sounds and lots of voices. I guessed it meant that I was leaving the hospital. Someone asked me if I was in pain but I just shook my head to indicate that I was fine. I went home driving in the same car. My nails dug into the seat as I remembered the previous car journey that I had taken, the jubilation of my friends when as we got into the car, the trophy in my hand, the laughter all around and then the violent crash and the nothingness after that. I sat in the rear seat not talking, and neither was anyone else. I guessed they were also trying to get used to my blindness.

When we reached home I was helped to the dining room where I had dinner and then helped up to my room where I slept. Helped. Yes, I needed help with everything now, didn't I? On the following days, I was helped down just for my meals and after that I hid up in my room. I remained closeted in my room, refusing to meet my friends, to listen to music or do anything. I told my mother that I wasn't ready. She kept on asking if she should call any of my friends over. I kept on saying, "No". I guess I didn't want them to see me this way. The remains of a girl destroyed by her tragedy, a tragedy that was like a single domino that brought down all of the other dominos... all of me.

I gradually made myself even more scarce. I asked my parents to bring up my meals to my room. My room became my world. I walked around in it, memorizing it, knowing where every step would take me, counting the number of steps from the closed door to my bed, from my bed to the window that would never again show me the outside world, and then back again to the closed door. When my parents brought food, they would suggest that I could perhaps listen to music or to audio

books. I constantly refused. I became a complete recluse, I stopped talking to people. My world resonated around me, my room, my food and the bathroom. I started to hear more, the swoosh of the AC, the ticking of my clock and the gentle whistling of the breeze through my window. I also started to feel more - I could tell exactly where I had cried on my pillow even days after it had dried.

People started to give up on me and instead of trying to engage in a conversation, they just put the food on my bed side table four times a day and left me to myself. I had just my room to feel, my food to taste and the small things to hear.

Months passed in darkness. Then one evening, when my door had been inadvertently left open, I heard a sound from the room next door. It was my brother playing his guitar. The music slowed me down, as I allowed every note, every chord to wash over my tears. After a long time I was finding brief minutes that were not spent in recrimination and tears. After that, I listened to him every night as he played his tunes. I started humming and then singing to the tunes he played, some times knowing the lyrics and sometimes making up my own. One night I heard my door open and heard someone sit next to me.

“Hi,” my brother said hesitantly, “I heard you singing to my music from the other room so I thought...maybe... if I played here so it wouldn't be so muffled”.

“ Thanks.” I mumbled. He started playing, strumming the strings in grand strokes and letting the melody move around us. I started to hum and then, getting more confident, I started to sing softly. After some time my brother stopped playing and I felt the darkness come back hesitantly, as though it was now unsure of me.

He whispered, “I'll come back tomorrow, okay.” I nodded. He squeezed my shoulder and then left closing the door gently behind him.

After that evening, my brother came to my room every evening to play for me. Then one day he brought me a surprise. He came in the afternoon instead of the evening and came sat beside me and said, “Happy Birthday.” He then slid an object into my hand. I felt it, the strings, the curved side and the shiny surface.

“This isn't your guitar.” I said.

He replied with a soft chuckle “How do you know?”

“The wood is smoother and it smells clean,” I said my voice wavering a little at the expectation of what he was going to say.

He finally said it, “ That is because it is yours. I have known for a long time how much you have wanted a guitar. Do you think I don't remember your tiny head peeping around the corner to my room every time I played when we you were little.”

I was speechless, I think he understood what I felt because he hugged me. Then he said, "Try it out."

I picked up the guitar and listened to the notes being coaxed out as I plucked each string. I put my fingers on the frets and started playing notes. Then I started playing chords, made-up ones, using their sounds to guide me. My brother smiled, "See you know how to play, the music is coming right out of you." My fingers flowed across the strings and frets as I played. I started singing. And then without being able to see his face, I smiled at him, my first smile in many months, my first smile since the accident.

I continued playing every day. My brother dropped by with my meals and used to stay and listen. I started giving voice to the songs that danced in my mind. I felt better day by day and happier by the second. It took many, many days, but finally I mustered up my courage. I opened the closed door and walked out of my room. I took a few steps towards the living room and then I ran into something hard. I stood stock-still, completely lost in my darkness. I knew every part of my room but not every part of my house. I was frozen to the spot, my guitar in one hand, not daring to move forward in case I hurt myself. I slowly sank to the floor, leaned against the wall and started playing the guitar and humming along.

Then I heard a noise from one side. It was the sound of feet scraping against the carpeted floor. I didn't move my head in that direction, knowing that it would not help me recognize the person coming towards me. I heard my Dad's voice, "Can you sing for me again? It was beautiful."

I put the guitar on my lap and started to sing. I heard him quietly sobbing. "So amazing," he mumbled.

"Thank you Dad, Could you please take me to the living room."

"Yes-s of co-course," he said stuttering a bit. I made my way with his support to the living room and sat in the chair facing the window.

"Are the curtains open?" I asked my Dad.

He said, " Yes."

"I know I can't see the sun but I'd like to know it's there for me," I said, "it's true what I said in the hospital about the sun not rising for me but it was not because I had nothing left but darkness. The sun could not rise for me because it had never set. "

Maybe I won't come to terms with being blind but I can always think of other things to do. When one door closes another one opens. People who don't get through the new door are the ones who are still looking for the old door. Maybe I lost my sight but the sun will still shine in my mind. And that is the only place where it matters.