

ISSN: 0976-8165

Bi-Monthly, Refereed, and Indexed Open Access eJournal

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 8, Issue- IV (August 2017)

UGC Approved Journal No 768

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Steps

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Thumping down the stairs she came panting and opened the door but found no one. That was the third time she had repeated that action; delusions, hallucinations, fear, or wait....what was it? Sabrina closed the door in dismay. Having come down with such labor, she thought to stay back downstairs as she might have to rush again to answer the doorbell. She went into the kitchen to check if everything was ready and in order.

” Mutton Biryani, Seek kebab, Raita, Roti and Sa... Salad.... Oh! I have forgotten to prepare salad. Anees is really fond of salad and will be annoyed with me if I do not provide him that with the meal.” She thought and muttered to herself.

Unconsciously she picked some raw vegetables and fruits to prepare salad for Anees. It was the birthday of Anees, her twenty year old son, who had passed away last year due to brain tumor, leaving everything dead and still for his mother. But still one thing that had not died was Sabrina’s wait. Her immortal wait.

It was 21st October, 2014 when Anees first fell ill. He had high fever. Sabrina, a single mother, fled from her work to take Anees to a doctor. Sabrina worked in a boutique, earning nominal. But somehow she managed to keep up to the expenditure of a two member family. She took Anees to the doctor nearby the house. Doctor prescribed him the medicine informing them that it was a viral. Sabrina brought Anees back with her own aid as he was not able to step a single foot properly. She prepared some food for him and made him take the medicine. Having consumed the medicine, he fell fast asleep. That night passed calmly; mother sitting cautiously beside her son and monitoring his every movement.

Next morning, Sabrina was already up when Anees got up feeling a strong sensation of high body heat. He called his mother meekly. She came and checked .He was having high fever again. She repeated the dosage of medicine given by the doctor. That went on for some days. But Anees was not getting well and Sabrina was getting worried for him. She could not even go for work and that was affecting the household income. She managed with that somehow but the thing that was bothering her more was the health of her only son. She consulted some neighbors and they advised her to take Anees to some good doctor at big hospital.

Next day early morning after daily Namaz, she prepared food and got Anees ready for visiting some doctor at hospital. Anees’s physical movement was affected. He was not able to move properly; feet as well as hands. Sabrina was worried as she had gauged out that something of

urgent concern had taken hold of her son. They went to the hospital and met the doctor at OPD. Checking him carefully, doctor asked Sabrina to get his MRI done. From her leftover savings she managed to get that done. MRI was done and reports were taken to the doctor. Doctor read the report and checked the scan meticulously. Some kind of group of tissues was seen in one part of the brain. Doctor was concerned as he could judge what it was but did not want to say anything until and unless he was dead sure. He asked Sabrina to admit Anees in the hospital as they have to further diagnose the problem. Sabrina did the formalities for the admission. She was highly concerned about her son's health but lack of money was creating an irk for her. Doctor had asked him to be admitted to do his needle biopsy of brain. He wanted to confirm whether the cluster of tissues was cancerous or not. Biopsy was performed and Anees was discharged after a due course of time.

“It will take a week's time to get the report of that biopsy, so meanwhile you can take him home.” Doctor said to Sabrina, prescribing some interim medicines.

She bought the medicine and brought Anees back home. Her eyes were swollen and crimson. She had not slept for two days. She wanted to sleep but it was like her mind did not permit her to. She prepared food and fed Anees with her own hands. Making him comfortable in bed, she went to her neighbor's house to ask for some aid. She requested Niaz Bibi to attend her son for sometime so that she could go to boutique and work for some time and earn a little. Niaz Bibi agreed readily. Sabrina went to work.

When time starts taking toll on someone, it takes rigorously. She reached the boutique and the owner of the boutique started scolding her for being away from work for so many days. She listened passively and resumed the work she had left that day hurriedly. She worked late night to complete it. Around 10'0 clock, her master came and asked her to go home as it's late. She was hesitant to ask but had to ask for money but master denied saying she had not completed the work. Disappointed, she went home. She opened the door and Niaz Bibi was sitting there knitting something. She felt gratitude for her support and offered to make her tea. Niaz Bibi thanked her for the offer but asked for her leave. Sabrina locked the door and went to Anees's room to check him. Anees was sleeping. She went to sleep too.

Next day, she checked how much of ration was left in the house. Some rice, flour and cereals, no oil and spices. She, then, checked the money in the cupboard and found just 2000 rupees. Her anxiety was rising due to impending reports and the further treatment which would be advised by the doctor and those meager 2000 rupees. She did household work and requested Niaz Bibi for the help and left for work. That routine went on for the days until the report came. The day when the report was to be collected, Sabrina went to hospital alone. She collected the report and showed them to the doctor. Doctor read it and pronounced politely “Bibi, admit your son immediately in the hospital for further treatment. He is suffering from brain tumor.....”

On hearing that, Sabrina couldn't think of anything for a while. Although, nowadays treatment for such diseases is available but the very name of CANCER /TUMOR, ones jilt the listener. Sabrina sat still and did not say a word .Doctor repeated his words adding "it's at second stage, Bibi. We have to start the treatment as soon as possible."

She sat stoic and asked just one thing, 'Is it curable?'"

"Bibi, if we start the treatment now. We can cure it. Arrange the money so that we can start the treatment."

She stepped out of the hospital and started moving towards the direction of her boutique. She did not bother about the distance and the scorching heat. She moved thoughtlessly without life in her body. The Sun and its waves, sultry weather, Miles distance to be covered; nothing hit her like the news that her only son, in the prime of his life, was suffering from Brain Tumor. Thinking and lost, she reached her boutique. She started the work without greeting anybody. She completed her work and went to the master. She stood in front of him and said" Sahib! I need 2 lakh rupees."

"Are you alright? What do you think I am? And who do you think you are? "

"Sahib, my son is not well. I need money for his treatment."

"What calamity has taken place? You need so many rupees!"

"I will return it definitely. I will work for you day and night."

"Day and Night! Day is fine, Bibi, but how will you manage Night?"

"I will manage, Sahib!"

"OK! Then it's done. Come for the night and take the money."

Sabrina could not get him at first but later on when got him, wanted to hit him so tight on his face that he could not dare to say anything like that to any lady henceforth. But she left the place without any argument. She went to her house and after entering went directly to her son's room. The very sight of his sleeping son brought tears into her eyes. She managed to calm herself down. Then madly she checked every nook and corner of the house to find some money but at last threw herself on the floor and cried to the loudest of her voice and agony. Niaz Bibi heard her cries and came rushing to the house. She inquired and Sabrina told her everything. Niaz Bibi consoled her and gave her a glass of water. Then she told her that she would help her with whatever she can.

Fifteen days had passed since the day doctor confirmed Brain Tumor. Anees was still not admitted to the hospital. His health was deteriorating consistently. Finally after fifteen days, she was able to arrange 50,000 rupees, with the help of her neighbors. Anees was taken to the

hospital, all the formalities were done. Doctor told Sabrina that with the passage of so much time Anees's tumor might have grown more, so he needed to diagnose again; the stage of tumor.

According to the doctor the tumor had reached the initial phase of fourth stage, so it was quite risky to operate him at that stage. Sabrina requested the doctor to help them in any way possible. Doctor was helpless. In a blind hope that her son would recover she did not take him from the hospital. Anees was kept in the hospital on Sabrina's insistence and was being medicated so that his death could be prolonged. But Sabrina, in a delusion or say, not in a state to reconcile with the news of her son's approaching death, did not take him home.

One fine morning, Sabrina had gone home to check out that everything was fine there. She cleaned the house which was close from last so many days. She cleaned the dust deposited upon the worn out furniture. After cleaning everything and preparing the meal for Anees, she took bath and got ready to go to the hospital. She was about to move out when, suddenly, her phone rang up.

"Bhabhi jaan! We are bringing Anees home. Don't come to the hospital." said Asfaq, Niaz's husband, and hanged up the phone.

"They are bringing Anees home!" Sabrina murmured to herself while thinking hard.

Forgetting everything and hoping that her son might be well enough to be brought back home, she started setting his room more beautifully. She went out into the garden outside the house and plucked some fresh flowers. Washed them, placed them in a pot and kept it beside Anees's bed affirming to herself, "They say it's good to keep fresh flowers in the room of a patient."

As the doorbell rang, she rushed downstairs, hardly taking a breath. She opened the door but found nobody. She stepped out a little and found something covered with a white cloth, on the floor.