



## Death on the Table

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### When I died...

It wasn't sudden. I was on the Operating Table from 0730 hours,  
Said hullo to the green-robed staff before they donned their masks.  
'We'll try a laparoscopic entry,' the cardio-physician had said.  
'If that doesn't work, another surgeon's team will take over instead  
And open you up. The procedure will take half a day at most,  
And one full week in hospital.' Then, at home, I could toast  
To my health after another fortnight.  
However, things didn't go right.  
At the start, I heard their voices, calm, confident, unperturbed.  
I don't know when the clanging and the panic no longer unnerved  
Me. I don't know when something bled, something punctured,  
Something was mopped, cauterized; something ruptured.  
Someone handed over 'my case' to someone else,  
Someone checked the anesthesia, everyone was tense.  
I don't know when they opened me, sawed a bone, a rasping sound.  
Nor whether my family knew what inside me they had done or found.  
Twelve hours later, unconscious, I was wheeled into the ICU.  
Hooked to a ventilator, pumped with inotropes, flabby flesh tinged blue.  
Someone cried.

### The Spouse's version...

It was sudden. Though we'd been told about the risks, etc., we  
Had been assured those could be tackled, in large hospitals quite easily.  
We were up by six. At 0730, after a quick bath and short prayer  
Dr. Y's 'MVR case' was rolled away. A 'see you later' and I was alone on a stair  
Outside the OT, standing on one foot, resting the other against a wall,  
Connecting with friends, siblings, preferring a message to a call.  
Someone stood beside me, first we talked, then I sat scrolling on the phone.  
Someone stepped out of the OT, in baggy dress, explained in a kindly tone  
'Some more time, can't say how long'. We lunched.  
And returned, voices low, shoulders hunched.  
No news came from within, whatever was happening, we were not to know.  
We tired of sitting. More friends bustled around with chai and comfort, to and fro.

The stretched day seemed endless. What was happening? Would someone tell Us something? We asked a receptionist, a passing nurse, a ward-boy. It was hell, Waiting helplessly, waiting, sighing, waiting, looking at the phone, At each other's faces. By evening, all of us, we were worn to the bone. Twelve full hours and my unconscious love was wheeled into the ICU. Hooked to a ventilator, on a dialysis machine, flabby flesh tinged blue. Tension. Tension.

### The Registrar's view...

It was sudden. All were briefed on what to do, observe, expect. I was by the console, staring at the glowing screen. The entire effect Of a live supra-major-plus surgery can't on a simulator be seen. Nothing prepares one for 17 deg. C, the gleaming high-tech tools wrapped in green. The little holes in between ribs, the long, thin, wiry probes, fingers steady. The nurses in position to get-set-and-go, skilled technicians, all ready To do their bit to make this patient's life whole again. We study our cases in detail, their discomfort, their pain. Go through causes and solutions, discussions, preparations, Sharing diagnosis, prognosis. Debating procedures, balancing medications. In spite of all care taken, the unpredicted happens. Things went wrong that day. Everything seemed smooth. 'Pincers', 'forceps', 'swab'. Heard someone say 'NO-NO-NO'. A fluster of activity followed. Dr. X. took over. An anaesthetist swivelled; a nurse flung out the crash-trolley cover. I don't know when or why the patient bled. At that moment the patient was (possibly?) dead. Twelve hours total. Comatose went the patient to the ICU. Hooked to life-supporting apparatus, pallid skin tinged blue. What now, what to do?

### The Well-Wisher said...

It was sudden. None challenged anything/anyone. The bills were paid. The word 'post-mortem' wasn't even uttered. All were afraid To say it was 'death on table'. There should be questions, hows and whys. Brimming tears spilled off civil lids. Acquaintances trooped to say their 'byes. Someone said, a high-risk case, things happen. Someone asked, was there a chance Of human error? Someone wanted to know between carelessness and negligence What the difference was. Someone replied, if the reading of a parameter Is taken but noted wrongly, that's carelessness. If he or her or they Do not take a reading at all or don't bother to consider it that Would be negligence. Someone said, enough, now, and we sat With the spouse, melancholy, recalling good times, recent and of long Ago. Someone or other said, from time to time, 'be strong'. Someone pointed out that the OT team seemed to be grieving, too. Heads hung low, they'd stood by us, wordlessly, even though they knew What had gone wrong and we didn't. Questions arose after we returned Home. Why? How-when-what? Why, why, why? Miserable curiosity burned In our minds. Was it a botched procedure or just human error? No One disagreed that it was naseeb, destiny. Better to just let go. It remains an enigma in my head.

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