

Reflections

The Wings Are Mine**Dr Shafaq Nazia Shaikh***Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Jamshoro*

Every time you see a patient, you don't just give them medicines. You give them hope and comfort. And in return, they give you a small part of their personality: A little ache, a little sadness, a little grief. Some encounters are brief but ponderous, carrying a swarm of sentiments. How do you help someone when you are emotionally submerged yourself? That is what I am learning each day. Allow me to offer a fleeting glance into something that some of us might be encountering right now, may have faced previously, or may do in the future.

As I entered the room, the air was different. It smelt a bit like medicine and a lot like loneliness. I saw her lying down on the edge of the bed with her eyes closed. Her delicate frame and translucent skin seemed to whisper tales of her time. Every wrinkle held a narrative from her era. Grace and wisdom were emanating from the silver in her hair. I would have thought she was sleeping, but the frown on her forehead, told me she was not. I sat down quietly beside her. I did not want to startle her. The silence was deafening, but perhaps it was my presence that was loud.

She opened her eyes and looked at me. I expected a frown-less greeting. But instead, I got a stare barren of emotions.

"Who are you?" She asked. I had many answers to that, yet none at all. Who am I? Am I a doctor? A visitor? A scared little girl inside of a grown woman? Or am I all of these rolled into one?

Who are you? I have been asked this question countless times before, but when asked by this frail old lady, it hit hard. And it hurt. I may not know who I am, but I know who she is. She is my unwavering support. She is my mother.

She is weak and scared. The two traits that were never a part of her personality, sum up all I see now. I was raised by a strong-headed woman who taught me how to flawlessly juggle work, and home, and let the world watch in awe. And while she practiced what she preached, her children were kept safe under her wings, oblivious to the turmoil of womanhood. She was so adept at maintaining her image as an unshakeable pillar that no one noticed her weakening foundation. She never admitted



to being tired or sick. I wish she had. Perhaps I could have borrowed her wings to keep her safe.

In every phase of life, there are moments of pain and pleasure. Old age is no exception. As one enters the autumn of their lives, they find joy in seeing their children thrive and succeed, yet they also experience the sorrow that comes with declining health and the passing of loved ones. No wonder everyone wants to live a long life, but no one wants to be old. In those troubling times, a single word of kindness or a small gesture of support can momentarily bring happiness to someone who is fearful and uncertain. As a doctor, you are expected to fix everything. And despite the best of intentions, things don't always fall into place. But as a daughter or a son, all that is required of you is your presence. And that is enough to fix it all.

Navigating adulthood is not simple, I have always sensed that. But now I truly understand the complexity. Assuming the role of a caregiver as your parents enter the years of senescence is inevitable. Senility is not like an invitation that you can choose to accept or decline. It just arrives, whether you are prepared for it or not. It is a stage that reflects all the dreams that were lived and

all the nightmares that were survived.

I would describe adulthood as standing in the middle of a busy highway. On one hand, I watch my child flourish, and on the other, I witness my parent's strength wane. The latter once stood where I do now, yet I never saw them falter. Perhaps they were good at concealing emotions. Which makes me wonder: Can my child discern my hidden worries, or can she tell when I am pretending not to be?

I have seen many patients in delirium- restless, agitated, and terrified. You can't help but feel for them. But when it's you personally experiencing it, the empathy is so intense that it overflows from your eyes. Each encounter with such situations erodes a part of your inner child, until eventually there is nothing left.

A caregiver must stay resilient, as the entire family relies on them. It is heartening to remember that not everyone is lucky enough to take care of their parents when

they need it the most. Being given this chance suggests that they are cherished by The Divine. Setting aside the challenges, being able to repay the sacrifices they once made for us is humbling. By offering something as small as your time, you receive immeasurable blessings in return that have no substitute. And that keeps you strong.

My mother might experience occasional lapses in recollection. But I am ingrained in her memory, an unforgettable part of her. The moment she sees me and recognizes me, her eyes light up. In that instant, I feel like a child again. No matter how many times my heart breaks, I gather the pieces and show up. She kept me safe under her wings all her life. But now the roles have reversed. The wings are now mine.