

*Room for a view***The anchor**

How do I find the words to tell you that he's dying? This man whom I met only 24 hours ago, whom you have loved, leaned on and supported for these past 50 years?

We met in the intensive care unit. He looked so weak, so pale, lying there listlessly on the gurney. And you, you had the look of a person who had just come to the realization that the reality you so desperately wanted to believe was a façade. You exuded an aura of denial and defeat, a mixture of bravery and fear. Seeing him lying there, out of the context of the bedroom of your bungalow, you saw the situation with fresh eyes. And you did not like what you saw.

You, after all, know this man so well. Over the half-century together, he has taken care of you and you of him. You are the pillar of strength in the family, the anchor. In your youth, you created a solid mooring from which he and your family went out and explored the world. And yours was a world of domestic comfort and resource management, both economical and emotional. You came from an era that espoused the idea that behind every strong man was a strong woman and you certainly lived up to that notion. Even now, the wrinkles on your face and your frail frame can't disguise your hardness and the spark of inner strength still flickering in your eyes, eyes that have seen a lifetime together. But even your experienced eyes could not see the mass that was growing inside of him. That responsibility would fall to the sterile insight of the hospital endoscope.

So how do I tell you he is dying? For I suspect that when I tell you, you will feel as if you have failed, even though you tried your best. And you have already done so much. You did not know that as he struggled to swallow, something more sinister was lurking beneath the surface. Perhaps you did not want to know. You cooked his favourite meals, blended his foods, made it your sole mission to feed him and make him stronger. You had already made it through so much together, you were sure you could make it through this, too. But this was



one storm that defied the holding power of your anchor.

My pager goes off right after I talk to you. I instantly silence it and look toward you, ready to continue the conversation, ready to answer your questions. Your eyes meet mine, steady and bright, the edges brimming with tears. You reach over, grasp my hand, and nod your head. You walk toward his bedside, so small yet so strong, ready to hold a constant vigil. After you tuck the bed sheet

underneath his chin and smooth out his pillow, you turn and gesture to my pager, as if to tell me: it's okay, go on with it, you have a job to do.

We both have a job to do.

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