

CREATIVE SPACE

I'd like to die only once

VASUNDHARA RANGASWAMY

So, what if I smell, speak and look different,
So, what if I am drugged and obtunded?
I can still sense
My emotions are not blunted.

True, you have a lot to remember,
But I have a name, other than my bed number,
Other than my illness
An identity besides my quirkiness

The new bed seems like an airplane, I'm scared.
Flying up and down, sideways and sloping,
Pulling at my lines, tubes, tapes and insides,
Can you please move it after much telling?

Can you please draw the screens or sheets,
As I have parts just like you do,
Even if they look cheap, I wear clothes,
For the same reasons you do.

Should the leaky mask ties cut through my skin?
Can the sticky cold gel be left on me?
Are the defunct monitors, their alarms and din,
To fool me, that I'm being cared for, critically?

Lying wet in urine, tapes ripped off my moustache and beard,
Fingers tied, bleeding. Because you think I am mad,
Jostled around, shoved and sneered at
Does pain not make me sad?

Do I not need food and water?
Because I look like I did not need them before?
Sometimes, dripping fluids swell me up
Attempting to wash my toxins and me to the core.

There is no chair next to my cot,
No one to share my sleepless thoughts...
My cows, kids, and lost wages
The sights and sounds, moans and groans,
Beeps, ambulances and cold faces,
Sleepless thoughts of mounting loans,

A psych consultation for my pleas, if heard,
'Coz it is blabbering for you as you understand.
Are my tears of fear and depression,
Not real in this alien land?

When you poke my belly and shake my head,
When you fling words across in a language I never read,
Before you leave, can you please translate all that you have said?

When you shout, "Don't you understand?"

No, I do not. It is not my subject to mull.

Neither did I go to school,

Nor have good food to feed my shrunken skull.

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*Whisper, whisper — he can't pay,
Address issues with his Aadhaar,
No free brain CT worth 2k
Just scribble DNR.*

*Your laws can banish us anytime,
You know we'll come to you naked and kneeling,
Haggling for life, every nickel and dime.*

*Only one of you I yearn to see
He doesn't speak much in your company
He sneaks in, in the silence of the night,*

*Draws up my sheets and signals to keep mum
My dry eyes meet his wet
When he touches my forehead in my drugged delirium.*

*Experiment on me with no formality or stress,
On us who enjoy doles and free healthcare,
We help in your other business,
On those bodies where you wouldn't dare.*

*Practise kindness on my body, at least when I am dead
Although I'd like to die only once,
At home, in my own bed.*