

Inside Out

Short Story -Entry for Writing Competition 2018

There are ghosts encircling on my motionless body. I could see them and I could hear them writhe in pain, but I could not help them. Actually I could see my ghost too.

Could I help myself?

No, I was not moving.

Was I still alive?

In the far distance, in a building with men wearing wigs sitting on high pedestals and with a wooden hammer in their hands, playing god, and twelve commoners to their left, playing the society, deciding the fate of all the ghosts around me, including mine, and shouting fiercely with anger- you are going down, you are guilty, you are convicted, you are finished, and then all bowed, and this ritual went on and on and on, with each ghost jumping into an abyss we call "Inside".

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As I float through on the “Inside”, I meet other ghosts.

He shared the cell with me. As he came “Inside”, his partner broke to him the news that he was going to be the father. Almost thirty three months later, his son has grown without a father, even though his father is alive. His son has started saying “dada” but he does not recognise him. His son has heard his voice, but the son does not know who “HE” is. He worships and adores his son’s photographs, and plans to give him the best in life, but he doesn’t know how.

This is life “Inside” out.

His wife is on dialysis, and coming in and out of coma. She asks for him, to the doctors, as she is transported between a care home and hospital. She doesn’t know why she can’t go home or she can’t meet her husband. She asks her children. They say he is travelling on business. She does not know that he is “inside”. He suffers

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silently, praying for his wife to live. She is old and worn out. He is old but still fighting, as he feels let down. His hands shake with old age as he writes one application after another to go back to his family. “Inside” he still has to serve another 21 months. He asks his daughter to create a will to fight on, in his wife and her mother. Why don’t you play her favourite songs on you tube? Let her not loose the will to live. He thinks about her, whilst he dies every moment.

This is life “Inside” out.

He had spent last 20 years “Inside”. Now he walks with a support of a frame with wheels, in place of walking stick. He must be touching his eighth decade in this world. He was talking to someone in the chapel, “I have got parole, I should be leaving in another eight weeks, if I live that long”. He said breathing heavily through a frail, trembling frame, as always. He needs care almost every living moment. He had to find a hostel, where he could go to live, his last few days, as he had no one to go back to. It seems his wife had passed away, and his

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children did not want anything to do with him. He wakes up in the morning, and walks in the rolling frame to the chapel, every day, waiting to meet his god "Inside", maybe. He waits.

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He had no fingers, no hands and then I discovered that he had no forearms. He was armless-elbow-down. He smiled at everyone as they passed him. "Inside", I thought, how will he survive? How will he eat, wash, and do his daily chores. Outside, I knew, he would have care and helpers. He managed, I believe, as day after day, he was still exchanging smile, sometimes outside the chapel, sometimes the library and onetime even outside the gym in the que. When god had punished him already, why did the men need to punish him or further incarcerate him?

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Another man, with legs, but with no life in them. He sat on the wheelchair, with a bag of papers hanging on the side. He had put on a lot of weight. His wheelchair seat seemed to just about enough to host him, and take him from place to place. Then one day, whilst visiting the virtual campus, and as I was about to sit on table 6, it said, reserved for Mr. Jones, as it is most accessible for him. The sad part was that the lift to bring him from ground floor to first floor was not operational. Many a times I used to see him crawling up. He would sit on first step and then move to the second, using his hands to grip and protect from sliding. One day as I passed, he requested, if I could leave his wheelchair on the first floor, by the staircase, so I did. I contemplated, as I picked up the wheelchair, how he will hoist himself to the seat of the wheelchair with lifeless legs, which his body carried, with him. As I was coming down after leaving his wheelchair, someone said to me, hey, you should have kicked him, he is a paedophile.

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I was devastated, and I asked why be judgemental? Is it not enough that the world on the outside has already judged and incarcerated and handicapped all those on the “Inside”? Being handicapped is not a physical bane, it can be mentally debilitating too.

Many, many, many lives incarcerated everyday. For every wig wearing man’s judgement and every life sent down to the gallows, a lot of ghosts are born to bodies which still breath “Inside”, but stop living. These bodies are mourned by their children, spouses, parents and friends.

Suddenly I saw a ghostly body become a man again. He was at the reception, and it was his day of release.

A smile through the pain said it all.

No, I was not moving. Was I still alive?