

I Don't See You As Double Anymore!

Dr (Med) Shivadatta Prabhu*
Ph.D (Neuro)

In the middle of the flight, Kiara woke up to go to the washroom. When she returned, she was too lazy to push her way into the middle seat. And with Rishaan readily offering to shift seats, the seating arrangement changed. With 20 minutes still remaining for the flight to land, a sleep starved Kiara took another power nap, this time holding Rishaan's right hand more firmly. His heart skipped a beat at this sudden gesture. Rishaan's other hand, though, nervously moved to touch Diya's. Diya pulled her hand away. But a defiant Rishaan held her wrist again, this time firmly and more reassuringly. The changing behavioural dynamics between the three perhaps gave out a foreboding of what was to happen at Hotel Konkan - California, during their holidays.

When the flight landed at the Dabolim Airport, Rishaan felt uncanny...his excitement seemed replaced by an unknown fear that he found very difficult to decipher. He had noticed Diya's reluctance to hold his hand. But this was not new. Diya was becoming aloof, distant, anxious, and even angry in his company for last few months.

Things were not right for past few months and this was noticed even by Diya, their 9-year-old daughter. Their marriage was in doldrums. Despite several counselling sessions, interventions from friends, they were drifting apart. The family court had finally concluded that a divorce was the best option for them. The lawyers on both sides were busy thrashing out the deal of settlement. Diya knew it though nobody had spoken about it to her. This was their last holiday together. He had offered his home for Diya and Kiara as it was close to her school. He had prepared to relocate to Jamnagar where his latest job was located. As usual, the conscientious Kiara had decided to pay him a rent saying, "she does not want favours". She can afford his place."

"Yes! Always 'affordability' and 'favours'! Those were the words very common in Kiara's increasingly materialistic language." Rishaan thought to himself as they rode the bus to the terminal. He had met Kiara as a classmate in his business school. Her exotic origin as an exchange student from South Africa, her sports, impressive figure, clear thinking and little domineering attitude were the factors that had attracted him towards her. He was from a typical middle-class Indian family, studious and that difference was probably what led to the initial attraction. But bad investments, bad friends, bad decisions- all had added to his woes, slowly fading the attraction. They married after graduation. Both had started working in one bank but soon Kiara formed her own HR firm. Now she was into image consulting business, HR, start-up guidance, digital space - virtually into everything. Yes, she was successful. In contrast, Rashaan was still a struggler. He had changed jobs, the current being the sixteenth in two decades! Kiara started finding faults in him. Anything he did was not 'classy', 'thoughtful', 'smart' according to her. She started taking objections to his smoking, occasional drinking and his spending time with 'useless' friends. His new job in Jamnagar refinery kept him away for long-duration from their home in Mumbai. This led to a more rapid drift between them. These days it had become impossible to speak to each other without quarrelling. Despite the sweet, strong bond of Diya to hold them together, they were really moving away from each other sadly but irrevocably!

This was to be the last holiday together . Then he would move permanently to rental accommodation in Jamnagar. The question of Kiara shifting base never arose. She was successful in Mumbai. He knew that Diya as a girl, would always stay with a mother naturally and by the mandate of the law .He was sad by the prospects of rebuilding his life, in his middle age sans the company of loved ones !

They collected bags and moved out of the arrival hall. As usual Pratik aka Patrick was waiting with his car." Good morning "He said cheerily to the group. But he did notice the lack of warmth in their replies. Even the ever-bubbly Diya looked fatigued and disinterested in surroundings. Normally she would be animated, excited during the travel down the winding road to Hotel Konkan California' the boutique small hotel that Patrick's family ran at the edge of the beach.50 km from the airport. It was more famous for the superb fresh sea food served at the restaurant Hotel Konkan California 'also entertained long duration residential guests if they were known to the family. And of course Patrick knew Rishaan, Kiara and Diya since long. Since the time he met them as a newlywed couple on a honeymoon. After Diya's birth the annual retreat in at Hotel Konkan California had become a ritual for the threesome .

In the afternoon, after some rest they went on the beach that touched the backyards of the hotel .Rishaan had suggested Kiara to behave as normal as possible for the sake of their daughter and she had agreed .Diya started making a sandcastle .Kiara helped her ." Come Papa .Join us" Diya said enthusiastically .But one look at Kiara's face was sufficient to inform Rishaan that he was not particularly welcome ." Carry on dear "He said and turned his back to them , walking straight to the waterfront as he wished to avoid seeing Diya's crestfallen eyes.

Time went by. "Let us go see dolphins" Rishaan heard Diya as she walked up to him. They hired a boat and went towards the 'Dolphin Cove'." I don't see any family here "Diya exclaimed as she spotted only a single dolphin surfacing." Must be separated "He said casually but the piercing look that Kiara gave him was sufficient to quieten him suddenly!

"Look there comes the family." Diya shouted. In her excitement, she lost balance and hit her head on the bow." Can't you look after her? She was closer to you "Kiara rebuked Rishaan as she rushed to help her daughter .Diya was momentarily dazed but afterwards looked fine ." Let us go back" Kiara said firmly and they nodded silently.

Back at Hotel Konkan California Diya looked Ok. She had her favourite crab curry a dish Kiara hated. After dinner Diya suddenly complained of headache and vomited. "Must be those stale crabs "Kiara said accusingly" I also see you as double. Everything appears double to me "Diya complained. Both parents dismissed this complaint as Diya's overactive imagination. The y thought she was also stressed by their estrangement! "Go to sleep early "Rishaan told Diya. She agreed and retired. "There is nothing to do for me thought Rishaan and went out for a stroll alone.

When he returned, he found Kiara in hysterics, Diya unconscious and Patrick by her side." I think she has food poisoning "Kiara screamed. Patrick suggested that they should rush to a hospital." Ambulance? I Kiara enquired." "It will be faster by my car." Patrick replied as he took unconscious Diya in his arms. Rishaan wanted to sit in the back holding Diya but a cold look from Kiara made him sit in front with Patrick. They reached 'Prolife, the multispecialty

hospital nearby. The emergency physician examined Diya and called the consultant neurosurgeon. 'Does not look like food poisoning to me.' He informed them.

The neurosurgeon arrived. He quickly examined Diya. "Did your daughter complain of double vision? The eye balls are askew. She is unconscious. Let us get a CT scan right away" he ordered. As Diya was shifted to scanning facility both Rishaan and Kiara stood close, but avoided the eye contact and did not exchange a word. They just waited patiently.

Hey! That's an extradural hematoma like I suspected "The neurosurgeon exclaimed as the scans arrived in his consulting room. Kiara and Rishaan made clueless faces at him and the scans." "What does that mean?" Rishaan finally gathered enough strength to utter the words. "There is a big bleeding inside her skull, between bones and the brain. That is why she is fast sinking into coma. . Look at this displacement, her brain stem is being pushed down." The neurosurgeon explained. By now both Kiara and Rishaan were not interested in technical details. "Do something doctor, Do something fast "They urged." That is what I intend to do. Take the blood clot out surgically, stop the bleeding vessel "The neurosurgeon said. "Will she be alright then? "Rishaan asked." Should be, I see no problem. There are no areas of damage inside the brain on this scan "The neurosurgeon said. He asked them to meet the administrator for consent and went upstairs to the operating rooms.

Both could see just a glimpse of Diya as she was wheeled in the lift to reach operating rooms on the upper floor. They waited patiently in the deserted corridor in front of the ICU. The clinical silence was broken only by three things -the rhythmic 'tic toc 'of a nurses shoe as she sauntered in and out of the ICU ,some distant 'swoosh 'as the waves crashed on the sandy beach and muffled words of some ambulance drivers as they sat huddled in the garden and tried to remain awake on the night shift .

Rishaan could not bear the silence anymore. He started off in the direction of hospital canteen located near parking area ." Care for a coffee?" He asked Kiara. Without uttering a word, she nodded and joined him. They crossed the garden and sat at a table. Rishaan brought two cups of steaming coffee. One black coffee for her and one 'au lait 'for him. Looking at her preferred beverage in her cup Kiara smiled at Rishaan." Thanks "she said in a very dismissive tone. Both continued sipping their coffee in silence. Rishaan was fidgety. All the stress of past few days was making him nervous. Unknowingly his hand went into his pocket and he brought out the cigarette. He was about to light it up but realised the presence of Kiara." Sorry "He apologised, remembering how Kiara hated smell of his cigarettes. "It does not matter now. Why should you bother now?" Kiara retorted in an icy tone." "No! But this is hospital premises," he explained his 'sorry 'and went further away at the edge of the fence. The sea was not far from here and the salty ,nippy air added a flavour to his nicotine ." Things could have been different." He said to himself. " I should have been more sensitive to Kiara .I should have noticed her drifting, her unhappiness with me and my ways "He thought .But with a resolve he removed these thoughts of self-blaming and remorse from his mind .All that mattered right now was Diya's health .Oh God !How he yearned for the feel of her tight hug after he returned home from several days of absence !! In the flight he had purposefully held on to her hand even if Diya became quite uncomfortable. He was perhaps then trying to experience that warmth, engrave that touch, that sensation of togetherness forever in his memory. This was the last vacation together as a family. He also was uncertain how Diya a rapidly growing pre-adolescent, close to her mother would react to the final separation between parents. Would she crumble? Would she hate him after this? Would she

never hug him in future? The endless stream of thoughts continued to invade his conscious mind. Again with a firm resolve he wiped them off and went inside the hospital building.

Rishaan came to know that the surgery was already over .Diya was shifted to recovery room and the neurosurgeon had informed Kiara that the surgery was successful .He had missed seeing Diya being brought out of the operating rooms ,her being shifted ,the doctor talking about surgery- all those things .As Kiara informed him about the happenings during his absence, he thought he could detect the usual note of disapproval in her tone. Disapproval' at 'not being present at the moment when his family needed him most 'Disapproval' to indicate him being not concerned enough '! . That tone might have been true or imaginary .But in present situation he decided to ignore it altogether .

Few more hours passed. He got up from his sleep. He had sprawled himself on the bench outside the ICU. He did it completely ignoring the disapproval from Kiara who had assumed a cramped-up sort of position in a chair. The matron on duty had informed them to retire to their room, as Diya would take some time to regain consciousness. The strict matron also told them that she would be unwilling to let Kiara and Rishaan see their daughter before the visitors scheduled time. Yet they decided to spend the night in the corridor in front of the ICU. Rishaan noticed the garments askew on Kiara's body. He imagined that a shiver was also present over the exposed parts. It was cold there .The central AC unit was working overtime in the hot humid costal environment. He removed the sweater he was wearing and draped it over Kiara without disturbing her. He moved away immediately in order to avoid Kiara's questioning gaze should she become awake!

He woke up again as daylight broke through the windows and the hustle bustle of the hospital staff increased. Kiara emerged from the restroom. She was holding his sweater." Don't need this now "She said. He was about to say something like "yes I know "sarcastically to indicate their impending divorce but their attention was drawn to the nurse calling out their names." Your daughter is awake. Go see her. "The nurse informed them. With beaming smiles and fluttering hearts, they entered the ICU. Diya was sitting propped up in a bed. The head bandage, drains, wires, monitors all marred her appearance .But they were instantly relived when Diya said ," Hi Papa .Hi Mama. "" How are you Diya ?" They asked. The words coming from both mouths almost simultaneously. "I am fine. I do not see double any more "Diya informed.

Unknowingly both Kiara and Rishaan were holding their hands together. He tried to extricate his hand as he became aware of this. Kiara did not follow suit and held his hands in a firm grip. He then stopped his efforts.

"Now I do not see you as doubles. Not even one papa and one mama. I see you as one –one together!" Diya remarked knowingly and they happily nodded.

The new day had arrived. It had promised a new lease of life to Diya and to their relation too!

***Dr Shivadatta Prabhu is a clinician, neuroscientist. He writes in Marathi and English.**