Subjective Kindness

By the time Arjun Mehra was called to the witness stand, the trial had already been going on for three weeks.

He had grown accustomed to seeing his mother's name printed beneath photographs of the man who had killed her. The newspapers had found every possible way to describe the case without ever describing it as simply as Arjun understood it. There were articles about youth, academic pressure, mental health, parental expectations, and entrance examinations. Every explanation seemed to make room for the young man in the defendant's chair.

Arjun had listened to all of it from the second row. He had never understood why none of that understanding seemed to extend to him.

The defence lawyer stood.

"Mr. Mehra, your mother was declared brain-dead at approximately eleven in the morning, correct?" the defence lawyer asked.



"Yes," Arjun replied.

"And the doctors explained what brain death meant?"

"They did," Arjun said.

"They told you she would not regain consciousness?"

"Yes," Arjun answered.

"They also explained that her heart could continue beating with mechanical assistance?"

"Yes," Arjun said.

"And despite that, you authorized the withdrawal of life support?"

"Yes," Arjun replied.

"You could afford to continue paying for her treatment?"

"Yes," Arjun said.

"You did not request another examination or seek another opinion?"

"No," Arjun replied.

"So you knew your decision could not be reversed?"

"Yes," Arjun said.

"And yet you chose to terminate the treatment?"

"I knew she was dead," Arjun replied.

"That is not what I asked," the defence lawyer said.

"It is the answer," Arjun said.

A murmur passed through the courtroom.



“Please maintain order,” the judge said.

“Do you consider that killing?” the defence lawyer asked.

Arjun looked toward the defendant.

The young man sat behind his lawyers with his head lowered. His family had spoken about his pressure and disappointment. Experts had discussed the effects of failure and expectation.

“He was not crazy then,” Arjun said.

“Mr. Mehra, answer the question,” the defence lawyer said.

“He was not crazy when he killed my mother,” Arjun replied.

“Answer the question put to you,” the judge instructed.

“I am answering it,” Arjun said.

His voice trembled.

“You spent three weeks explaining him to us. You explained his examination, his parents, his pressure, and his disappointment. Every time someone asked why he did it, there was another reason ready for him,” Arjun said.

“But now he is the one who needs understanding?” Arjun asked.

“Objection, Your Honour,” the defence lawyer said.

“Where was that kindness for my mother?” Arjun asked.

The courtroom fell silent.

“She did not fail an examination. She did not disappoint anybody. She was not responsible for what happened to her. But she was the one lying in a hospital bed because he put her there,” Arjun said. “I sat beside her for eighteen hours.”

“I had enough money to keep paying. I could have paid for another day, another week, even longer if I wanted to. But what exactly was I paying for?” Arjun asked.

“Her brain was dead. She was gone,” Arjun said.

“I know what I did. I signed the form. I made the decision. I never asked for another examination, and I will have to live with that. But you cannot tell me that I killed my mother simply because I accepted what the doctors told me,” Arjun said.

“And you cannot tell me that the man who put her in that bed deserves more understanding than I do because he was under pressure,” Arjun said.

“Mr. Mehra, nobody is saying that your grief is not real,” the defence lawyer said.

“My grief?” Arjun repeated bitterly.

He rose from the witness stand.

“Mr. Mehra, please remain seated,” the court officer said.

But Arjun was already standing.

“My mother is dead,” Arjun said. “She was dead before I ever signed that form. She was dead when I held her hand and she did not know I was there. She was dead when I spoke to her and there was nobody listening.”

“I was sitting beside my mother after someone had murdered her, watching machines keep her body going while everyone discussed whether I could afford another day,” Arjun said.

“And you want to call me a killer?” Arjun asked. “He was not crazy when he killed my mother. But now he is suffering? Now we have to understand him?”

“I had money. I could have paid. But money could not bring her back,” Arjun said. “I pulled the plug because I believed my mother was already dead.”



“I did not kill her,” Arjun said.

Arjun pointed toward the defendant.

“You killed her,” Arjun said.

Nobody spoke.

“My mom is dead,” Arjun said.

“My mom is dead,” Arjun shouted. “And it is all your fault!”

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