

September Mourning

Charles S. Narasi

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**C.K.Sampath Iyengar.
(1903-1990)**

**This novel is dedicated to my dear father who inculcated
the value of education, self reliance, service and sacrifice,
honesty and integrity in all actions.**

My Special Thanks To:

My dear wife, Karen who is my cheerleader encouraging me to write the novel and helping me immensely with correcting my typing and adding her editing skills .She is a voracious reader of novels of all kinds.

To all my four brothers, Satyanarayan, Ramadas, Bashem and Ananth and my dear sister, Rama who supported me and my family throughout our tough ordeals.

To all our children, Rajni, Kristen, Sujata, Scott and Asha who endured disruption of family unit at a very young age and have grown stronger to face challenges in their lives.

To all my friends from Buffalo and a great community I was privileged to serve for nearly forty years.

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Chapter One

It was a cool September morning in East Amherst, New York. Chandu woke up before the alarm buzzer went on.

"Why do you even bother setting your alarm?" his wife, Kay, would ask.

But being a creature of habit, he did this everyday. His mind was on the procedures he had scheduled at the hospital that morning. He knew he had to face a couple of tough cases, that is technically speaking!

He got out of bed not making too much noise, making sure he would not wake Kay. He could hear her squeaky soft snoring and she was deep asleep, probably dreaming! He looked through the bathroom window out into the backyard. The leaves on the tall trees were beginning to turn color already, signaling an early fall. He looked at the sky and there were some puffy clouds. He tried to use the electric razor but the shaving heads were dull and even had a couple of small holes. He had to buy a new electric shaver! His beard was a challenge to lots of well known razors. The only one that worked well was a German brand. He went back to the old hand razor with shaving gel! That seemed to work fine. Something was on his mind when he was in the shower. He remembered the phone call he got from Raj, the day before, early in the morning.

He got the call at five in the morning. Raj wanted to talk about his work and his kids.

Raj had been a very close friend of Chandu since his medical school days in India. Chandu pulled out of his driveway in his brand new red Volvo, said 'Hi' to the jogging neighbor and headed towards the expressway. The Sun was just coming up brightening the sky adding an orange glow. At that time of the morning the traffic was light and Chandu eased into his lane and drove to the hospital.

He knew that his close buddy, George, would be waiting at the staff room where they would meet everyday and head to the cafeteria. Their usual ritual was to split a toasted bagel and have coffee and juice, discuss the days events. After that, it was off to the endoscopy suite to take care of patients.

Kathy at the reception desk greeted Chandu with a big smile.

"Hi! I hope you are ready this morning! You have six patients for colonoscopy! Marcy will be helping you in room six."

"O.K., Kathy! I am ready, willing and able!!" Chandu said as he changed to the scrubs and headed to room six.

"Good morning Marcy! How are you Richard? Hope you are all cleaned out well for me so that I can take a good look inside your colon!"

"All right, Doc! I hope so too!! I am hungry for a big juicy steak after I get through this today, Doc!"

"Well, you can have it for dinner late tonight, but not for lunch! Right Marcy?"

"That's exactly right! Here comes the good stuff, Richard!" Marcy said as she was injecting the sedative into the intravenous line. Within minutes Richard was in the twilight zone, snoring! Chandu skillfully pushed the long flexible scope through the large intestine and checked for any growths inside. The prep was excellent and he was happy that he was able to do a complete examination in fifteen minutes. Good news for Richard. He does not need this test for another five years. After taking a ten minute break, back to another patient. This one had a non-cancerous polyp detected three years ago and was here for a repeat exam. Again, good news!

No polyps were found.

"What do you say, Marcy! We are moving right along today!" "You've got four more to go, and I think you are on a roll!!"

Chandu took out a big polyp from another patient and assured him it did not look cancerous although pathology would have to confirm that.

He was down to the last patient and while in the middle of the procedure Kathy came on the intercom and said Chandu had a call from someone.

"Can you please take his number and I will call back right after I am done," Chandu said trying to finish the procedure. He was not expecting any calls and he thought Kay would be at the office to handle any calls from patients. Kay, his wife, had been his office manager and she did pretty much everything, registering the patients to getting them ready for exam and consultation.

He went to his dictation room and finished dictating his procedure report and closed the door to make the call. He felt a little uneasy for some reason but did not think much of it. He dialed the number he was given and his friend, Dr. Prabhakar was on line. His voice was shaky and Chandu knew there was something wrong. "Hey! What's up? Everything O.K.?" Chandu asked.

"I've got some really bad news for you Chandu. I am at Raj's house. Our friend is gone! I mean...I mean he is really gone forever! Please hurry and come over."

Prabhakar was sobbing as he said those words.

Chandu sat back in the chair, closed his eyes for a minute, totally not believing what he heard. How could this be! Raj, a great surgeon who had everything going for him. He had a beautiful home in the rich suburban area where only doctors and lawyers lived. He had been remarried and had three wonderful kids, two boys and a girl, and a very sophisticated wife from India. Chandu quickly finished talking to the patients, told Kathy he might not be in the next day, had some family emergency. Marcy could sense that something was terribly wrong but did not want to push for answers from Chandu.

"Take it easy, Chandu! Take care of yourself!"

Chandu hurried to the parking lot and started the car, heading to Orchard Place. He could not come up with any answers no matter how hard he tried.

Why would Raj die suddenly when he had such a great life. Chandu knew that Raj had minor health problems, early diabetes which was well under control. Only two weeks ago he had a bout of flu.

He arrived at Raj's driveway where an emergency vehicle was parked. There were several people around, and Prabhakar rushed to meet and hug Chandu.

"Raj hung himself in the basement this morning," he continued, "I got a call from Malathi, his wife. She went looking for him early this morning and was shocked when she went to the basement. Raj had hung himself and was dangling like a rag doll!"

Chandu felt like he was stuck by a dagger and stood still for a second. He couldn't fight back the tears running down his cheeks. As he was staring at the sky, the emergency crew lifted the body to the ambulance.

"Please don't take him! I must see him! I must see my friend," Chandu cried.

"Yes, Doc, you can see him! But we have to take the body to the morgue at the hospital. Make it quick!"

Chandu could only see the black and blue marks on Raj's neck and a swollen face. He gently touched his face and kissed him goodbye and said,

"May your soul rest in peace. I will miss you, my friend, for now but we'll meet again in heaven someday!"

The ambulance sped away and Chandu looked at Malathi and said, "Oh! My God!" and he gave her a quick hug and took her into the house.

"Do you want one of us to bring the kids home, Malathi?" Chandu asked.

"I really don't want to face them, what I am I going to tell them? Your daddy is gone for ever? Especially Reena, my daughter! She was so close to her daddy. What do I do? Oh! God! Why me? why me?" she cried.

Prabhakar said he would get the kids and prepare them for the worst news. She nodded and he left quickly to bring the kids home.

Chandu looked at Malathi and asked her if he could go down the basement and take a look. He did not wait for an answer from her and went down the stairs. As he got down and saw what was left of ropes hanging from the ceiling of the basement, a shiver went through his body. How was this possible for a young man to do this, this precise with no help! Again there were no easy answers. He stood in silence for a couple of minutes and muttered prayers softly.

Tears were running down his cheeks and a friend was no more! Thirty five years since the time they graduated from medical school, how things had changed in a split second! He came back up and saw Malathi in a fetal position laying on the couch, sobbing. He sat beside her, held her hand and said,

"Malathi, we have to think about Raj's funeral arrangement and notifying all the relatives about this tragic news. Do you have any idea? We have to contact a funeral home and, of course, there will be cremation. I am sorry I have to bring this all up, but we have no choice!"

Malathi nodded and wanted to wait for the kids to come home with Prabhakar. Reena and Jitu ran in screaming and crying and Malathi hugged them both as tight as she could and let them cry their eyes out.

Prabhakar made some phone calls to get in touch with the funeral home in Orchard Place not too far from home. Later that afternoon, the hospital would release the body to the funeral home for preparation. The preliminary report from the coroner confirmed cause of death as asphyxiation due to strangulation. There were no signs of heart disease or any complications related to his diabetes. Chandu made phone calls to other mutual friends and also realized he had not talked to Kay who was still at the office.

"Kay! We have to cancel our office hours for today and tomorrow. My buddy, Raj, suddenly died this morning and we have to make all the arrangements for his funeral. I will be home late and I will fill you in all the details. O.K., honey?"

Don't worry about me! I will be all right and I love you!" Chandu hung up the phone. He did not want to tell Kay on the phone how Raj had died.

Buffalo News was contacted and the obituary would appear in the paper the next day. After a long dreadful day he was ready to go home.

Chapter Two

The year was 1962 and Chandu along with his friends were waiting to hear about the results of their final examination to graduate from medical school. He called Raj and asked him to join the group at a restaurant across from the medical school. This was the same place they would go for lunch between classes. The place was small but clean and served good food. The waiters always took good care of the future doctors. Chandu's favorite snack was masala dosa with hot chutney, the hotter, the better. A strong cup of coffee followed. This time they would eat a whole dosa. Usually they would split the dish and also have half a cup of coffee each and split the bill. But this time, it was special. Culmination of years of hard work. Very soon they would start working in the hospital and receive a stipend. Raj came in a little late but joined the rest of the guys. Conversation revolved around what everyone would do after the internship which would last twelve months in various specialties of medicine. Most of the guys would stay in Bangalore and maybe start a private practice.

They were almost done with their lunch and asked for the check from the waiter. They all chipped in their coins and Chandu was in charge of collection. When they were about ready to leave Prabhakar came running and said, "The results are in, results are in. Come, they are posted on the bulletin board at the medical school". They were all anxious, and with their hearts pounding they hurried to the medical school to get a glimpse of the bulletin board. Chandu, Raj and Pabhakar made it through. Some of the others were not so lucky. They had to retake the exam.

Chandu and Raj high-fived and let out a loud scream. They called their parents and let them know the results.

Raj said "All that combined study we did and taking parts of the cadaver, like the brain and liver, home to study really helped, right Chandu?"

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