



# THE OXYGEN PLANT

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“I’m not telling a lie, daddy. It grew by three inches last night,” Munmun told her father and kept touching the leaves of the Jasmine plant. She loved her little garden in the balcony which had a dozen types of flowers.

“It’s not possible. No plant can grow by three inches in a single night,” Srinivas gave an absent-minded reply. He was busy calculating the money he had to spend in arranging Oxygen cylinders for his mother. Covid-19 had created mayhem in his city, and his own home didn’t remain unaffected by it.

“It’s possible. I had put some Bournvita in the soil. You say that Bournvita will make me grow taller,” Munmun said. “Then why can’t it help the plant grow taller?”

Srinivas didn’t reply back. He was making calculations on a piece of paper. Two weeks back, he had paid six thousand rupees for one Oxygen cylinder. Now the same supplier was asking for eighty thousand rupees for the same cylinder. It might have been a killer epidemic for thousands of families, but it was a gold mine for the black marketers. He didn’t know how to arrange such a huge amount of money to save his mother who looked so healthy till three weeks back during Holi. Then the vicious virus attacked her lung, and since then she had been lying in a private hospital at the mercy of doctors and nurses who were more interested in justifying their salary to the owners of the hospital rather than protecting the lives of the helpless patients for whom even taking a breath of Oxygen seemed to be a tougher task than climbing the Mount Everest.


“Mummy will be coming tomorrow from the hospital,” his wife, Sneha, said. “We have cleaned the room for her. I think she will be safe and comfortable there.”

“But we’d be needing Oxygen cylinders,” Srinivas said. “Or at least an Oxygen concentrator.”

“Shobhit Sharma is helping a lot of people. I’ve read news that he is providing free concentrators to poor people,” Sneha said.

“I’ve tried at his NGO. They can sell us a concentrator since we are not poor. But they won’t provide a guarantee card or a bill.”

“Does it make a difference?”



“I think it does. It’s a Made in China stuff. If something goes wrong, we will lose both. Mummy and money,” Srinivas’s voice showed the signs of extreme worry.

“Rimmu says he will be able to manage a branded concentrator by tomorrow.”

“Let’s hope he does. I’m going to the hospital now. I will visit mummy, and then I will go the Oxygen plant to get the cylinder refilled.”

“You don’t have anybody who can go with you? The cylinders are very heavy. You have got back pain. It’ll be tough for you.”

“No, I don’t think anybody will risk his life to help me right now. The fear of infection is very high,” he threw his arms in helplessness.

The queue at the Oxygen plant was way longer than Srinivashad expected. It was tough to keep standing there in the mid of the summer day with his masks on his nose. He was sweating profusely and he found it extremely uncomfortable to breathe through the mask. He thought about his friend, Tuhin, who had lost both his parents in the last ten days due to Coronavirus. He was in Singapore, and couldn’t even come to pay the last tributes to his parents. He watched everything on a video call. Till one month back, who would have guessed that children will become orphans, people won’t be able to see their parents’ dead bodies and many families will be completely wiped out from this planet.

Such thoughts kept coming into his head and he tried to focus his mind on the best outcome possible. It was tougher to be positive when you were at the receiving end of a tragedy. His chain of thoughts broke when his name was called. After two hours of waiting and standing, he could finally get his cylinder refilled. Now he could bring his mother from the hospital tomorrow.


He stayed in the hospital the whole night and came back to his home in the morning. The signs of fatigue and anxiety were written all over his face. But he believed in the power of God and he hoped that things will come alright. Although his belief couldn’t explain why God was so cruel to innocent people who hadn’t harmed anybody in their entire lives.

Srinivas didn’t know when he fell asleep. After three hours of lying unconsciously on the bed, he woke up. Snehad made tea for him. He finished the whole cup in less than a minute and grabbed a sandwich. He had to leave for the hospital urgently.

Munmun was watching him with innocent eyes.

“Papa, don’t worry. Grandma will be alright,” she said.

“I know, beta,” Srinivas said. “She will be healthy soon.”



“I have arranged Oxygen for her. Now you don’t need to run for cylinders.”

“That’s so sweet of you. I can always trust you,” he said and he went to kiss her forehead. Then he stopped. What if he was carrying the virus? Even touching your beloved ones had become a dangerous task nowadays.

Srinivas put on his shirt and trousers. He called up the ambulance driver to reach the hospital. He told Sneha not to worry. They had enough Oxygen for the next two days. Something will be arranged by then which will take care of the mother’s medical needs.

He left his house, and then he remembered something. He had to take the medical reports which were lying in the room where his mother was going to stay till recovery. He darted back into his house, went into the room, and opened the cupboard. He put the medical reports in his bag and headed towards the door.

Then his eyes caught something. He stopped, turned his neck and looked at the bed. It had a clean white bed sheet lying on it. Near the pillow, there was a small stool. The stool had the Bournvita’s glass container on it. The container didn’t have its lid on it.

Srinivas couldn’t help it. A smile came to his lips after a gap of two weeks.

A plant was coming out from the container. It was Munmun’s Jasmine plant.