

From Cocoon to Butterfly

“He is always wet and just moans. Don’t worry about his moans, he moans when he’s dry, wet, in pain, or medicated. All he can do is moan.” During this oncoming report was my first reflection of a fully dependent man I would soon identify as just room 105. He was an African American man who suffered from a stroke and simply had very little function or liveliness about him. He was an object in a bed that needed changed and turned every 2 hours.

As I began working through my checklist of endless tasks, I ran into his room expecting to change and turn him without any social interactions. I was blindsided by an assertive African American woman who instantly disclaimed “He is blind in this eye, make sure his feet stay moisturized, and if you have time, please write something motivating in this book. He enjoys it when I read them to him during the day.” I assured the woman that I would take good care of her husband, as I thought to myself “How does he enjoy the stories? He is a complete cocoon; Does he even understand what she is saying?” While biting my tongue, I finished my tasks and left 105. At this point, he remained 105, he was not a person, husband, or father, simply a task on a to-do list.

A week went by before I was assigned to 105 again. However, this time when I entered his room, I was shocked to see the man look up at me and speak. The cocoon was starting to crack open and beginning to expose the person trapped within the lifeless body. Another week had passed, and I saw the man walking in the hallway. The cocoon had finally busted open and out popped a walking, talking man. Later that day, the woman approached me at the nurse’s station. I congratulated her on her husband’s success. Her eyes busted with excitement as she pulled out her phone to show me videos of her husband doing rehab. I still can hear her telling

me “and look here I am being his little cheerleader!” I couldn’t bite my tongue any longer I had to ask, “How did you do it?” How did you remain optimistic as you sat next to your husband’s bedside every day reading him the book of motivating messages while he just moaned?” This is where I learned my biggest life lesson. She informed me that relationships are not 50/50. Relationships are about giving it your all when someone else is down. She began telling me that years ago when she had cancer, her husband took care of her every need. “He even gave me an enema, an enema, you know how embarrassing that is! He did everything for me when I couldn’t. This time is just my time to do everything for him.”

I grew so attached to this couple after watching them grow closer together as he regained his strength. This was my first encounter of seeing the transition of a lifeless cocoon back into a striving human being. I made the awful but common mistake of writing this lifeless body down as a task and forgetting to see the person inside the body. That day made me realize that there is no such thing as just a room number or task, but that every bed is filled with a patient who has an amazing story. It is just up to you to open your eyes and be willing to hear their story.

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