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Just Dance

Daksha M. Patel
Trafford (Jun 29, 2018)
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Just Dance is a loving tribute to a "saintly soul" whose generosity and kindness are evident in its pages.

Daksha M. Patel's tearjerker of a memoir, *Just Dance*, chronicles her great-nephew Rakesh's three-year battle with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) in straightforward, emotive language.

In its brief space, the book details Rakesh's diagnosis, treatment, and decline, as well as the effect he had on his friends and family. After his first year in college, where he was a member of the dance team, Rakesh was admitted to the hospital after experiencing debilitating headaches. Blood tests revealed his cancer, and he began chemotherapy and radiation. Over the next three years, he was in and out of remission and received various forms of treatment. He passed away at age twenty-three.

Patel—a doctor herself—was by Rakesh's side for most of his health journey, advocating for him to ensure that he got the best treatment. Her loving retelling of his experiences with cancer is deeply emotional. He was always texting and tweeting, she says, and kept his Hindu faith close to him. These details bring him to life in the intimate book.

In the first few chapters, scenes from Rakesh's childhood are shared out of sequence, in an almost stream-of-consciousness style. These early scenes do not contribute to the theme and purpose of the book. Transitions between described events are nonexistent, and there is no apparent theme connecting the scenes. After Rakesh's initial hospital visit, the book progresses along a chronological timeline, detailing his three-year battle at an even, engaging pace. Transitions between scenes remain muddled throughout, though.

Chapter breaks come at apt places and allow suspense to build. The casual, personable writing style brings affecting intimacy to the text, but lackluster verbs and imagery are distancing. Typos abound, though medical terms are clearly explained.

Despite the book's disorganized structure, everything ties together in the end. The catharsis offered at its conclusion may be encouraging to physician assistants and individuals coping with family losses, though some extraneous details—childhood stories, for instance—do not have much of an audience outside of Rakesh's family.

The brief text includes additions from others, including a personal statement from Rakesh that is emotionally impactful: "There are many joys in life, but none such greater than providing joy to others." A letter from Rakesh's doctor complements this sentiment, while photos and tweets ground the story.

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AIMEE JODOIN (October 2, 2018)

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