



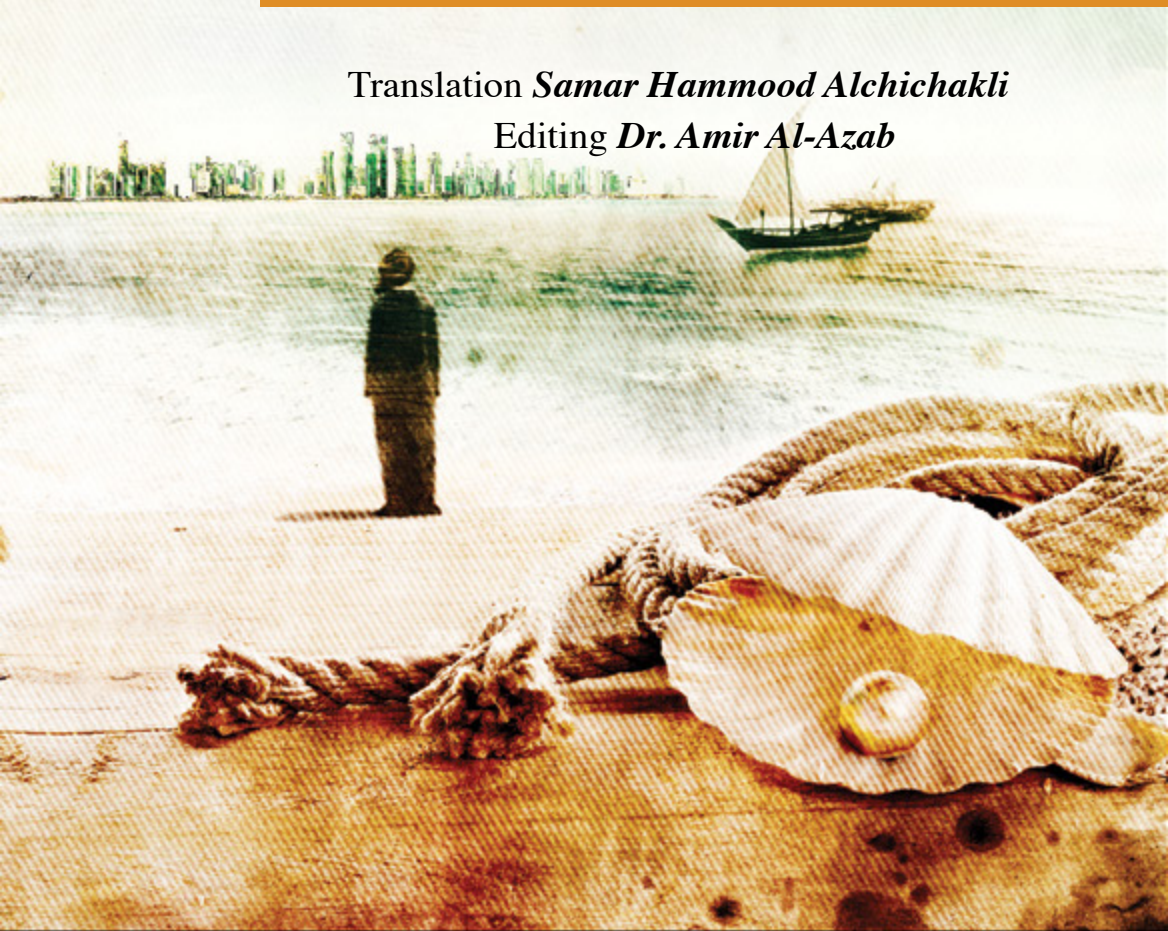
Ministry of Culture and Sports
Research and Cultural Studies Administration
Research and Studies Department

Crops

Anthology of Qatari Short Stories

Translation *Samar Hammood Alchichakli*

Editing *Dr. Amir Al-Azab*



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Short Stories

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Preface

Ministry of Culture and Sports in Qatar is keen to adopt the process of translating many books from different languages into Arabic, as well as translating Qatari literary and cultural production into other different languages to present it to the world. This shows a deep awareness of the importance of translation as a crucial cultural activity for the rebirth and development of the nation, and to open closed doors to other cultures, old and new.

Translation has been an important activity which faithful scientists, writers and intellectuals around the world took into consideration since the early date of nations, but it takes greater importance, and became more sensitive and dangerous issue in our modern era.

Qatari literature, especially the art of short story, is considered one of the brilliant aspects in Qatari culture. Although of being a new genre in Qatar, short story writers have showed a considerable presence in the Gulf and Arab area. So Ministry of Culture and Sports translated this collection of thirteen stories which was collected from different stories collections for Qatari writers, men and women. These collections were issued in different times before. It was collected and translated to give an idea about how far the development of short stories art is in Qatar, and to acquaint the foreign reader with the social and cultural Qatari identity.

Department of cultural Research and studies

To Die Twice

Kaltham Jabr

(1)

I tried to see your wheaten face, which reminds me of hot sand in my country, reflected in the fanciful waves of the Venice night sky, while echoes of a woman's rapturous cries had frequented.

Ears of wheat always predict the coming of the harvest season.....

I wished I had died twice...

Cafes, close to the quayside in «San Marco» square, were still playing melodies, if it stopped in this cafe it would resounded in the other cafe next door. Dancers seemed to be enjoying sipping a dream during the sleepy evening; they snuggled into the arms and chests of their beloveds and shared the dancing rhythms, they were on the terrace of every coffee shop. All this created a regular hymn which hugged the sea waves.

I was there alone dreaming of you wandering aimlessly.

Various cities had ejected their people who fled, frightened of the vanquished and broken reality life; they threw themselves into that vast sleepy square on a rainy day while everything was floating in a nebulous nap. «San Marco» square was surrounded by small, warm, quiet houses, rising tall, packed closely together.

It was drizzling gently, which tempted tourists together, they sat close to each other, watching the waves and enjoying the warmth. Guests, washed by the soft rain, hurried to find a place under the Cafes' shades. They sat near the musical band in every café. Drops of rain slipped silently saturated with summer smell. The summer season there was always heavily imbued with the fragrance of flowers hanging down from the windows of that small city.

The evening was fabulously cheerful.

I was about to look around for your tall figure, but my brother turned to me smiling; he had decided to leave the place after the end of the session. The square clock announced twelve midnight. I was still looking for you.

There weren't a lot of people; I was surrounded by my family, my mother and father, the other children and my brother with his ever smiling face.

I decided to enjoy the intense rough silence, so I sailed through the abyss which your absence created, driven by a hope that I might find you.

Loneliness raided me, dominated my feelings, I was haunted by bewilderment, but I found you.

You were looking for my fringe and ringlets; they were always hanging down my back; you were looking for the intimacy of my hustle, childish edginess and I feeling bored as you often said.

I looked for the hidden trembling in your calm as you melted in endless watchful horror. I also looked for your brown skin shining under the sun and our grief mixed with oppression in our hearts. We suffered so many contradictions around us....as I said one day.

I waited for your presence to pour down like rain.

You followed me wherever I travelled, fleeing the sweltering heat of my city.

We didn't know who had found the other, but we met just after I had crossed under the shiny branches of vines by the roadside.

Like a pet cat I snuggled into your shoulder, you caressed my black ringlets and smiled:

- Where is your cloak?

I smiled. For you, it was as if I burst out laughing:

- Where are your Ghutra, headband and white dress?

You burst out laughing, or I might imagine so.

- Is it possible to be in such a city does your dad wear that?

- Is it impossible for my father to be oriental in such a city? Well
neither am I.

We walked together suppressing our laughter...

You answered laughing and you murmured:

- We are men.

I pretended to be angry again, and I laughed, whispering.

- And I'm a woman!

We walked together holding in our laughter.

(2)

The trial was unfair.

The judge was silent, the room was spacious, but the prosecutor was all set up like a witless tiger. He was about to insert his fingernails in the innocent's flesh till blood comes out even before the verdict. Furthermore; he was fiercely devouring the attendees with his vigilant eyes.

The defense was weak. Being goaded and intimidated by the Prosecutor, he dwindled feeling forsaken. I was the only witness. Eyes were following me .You were behind bars haunted by astonishment and fear. The fatal surprise astounded you in that hall; you condemned my rebellion and being separated from actual reality as a woman who should lie down in the seclusion of her room rather than standing in such places like men. There, your looks fell on me like the whipping of a thunderstorm wind over my body; I was wrapped in a black cloak.

Your looks slipped away like lightning, and settled again over my uncovered face as I had taken the black veil off in order to testify openly before the judge, to prove your innocence...

You were about to explode when you were charged. The day itself was not a normal one.

The wind outside slapped the doors, the car windows and the palm trunks. It blew a heavy stream of sand into people's eyes till they bled. It dimmed the day light in front of luxury cars.

You were screaming inside, roaring and even raving silently.

You were my patient and I was your doctor. My testimony was the only thing which could have saved you from spending several years in jail. Yet you rejected me as a doctor, and abandoned me as a lover; you were afraid of hurting me, you were scared that they would kill me.

You tried to scream to protect my reputation; you tried to bring the black veil down again over my face. Yes, you tried but I resisted. I felt I was cracking but I still resisted.

You tumbled unconscious, trial was postponed. After that, strangers' looks began to crawl over my face. Wagging tongues left the room chewing over my story, they were eager to spread tales even before the judge had listened to my testimony.

(3)

You were shivering like a rain soaked bird ...

There were loud successive bangs on the doors, but I was not daunted.

I lay on bed with bare feet and uncovered shoulders but I was still dreaming.

Humming penetrated the silence of walls and reached me through my room's locked door.

This is what your daughter has gained from education, freedom , travelling abroad and such silly things!

It was my mother's voice, but this humming belonged to other people; my father was the one to blame this time.

Their hands stormed the door, and opened it wide to allow their feet to raid my room.

When I lifted my head I saw my parents' faces in front of me; I knew that the end had come. My father was behind my mother; my brothers' and sisters' were staring at me from behind my father's back, so were the servants, and some neighbors behind them.

I was still lying on my bed barefoot, shoulders uncovered; however I drew my robe to cover the rest of my body and some of my bereaved ringlets; then I dived back into a reverie.

(4)

- You can't go back to work

-

- I can't, believe me.

-

(I'm haunted by the image of your face behind the bars while you were waiting for the trial)

- I knew that you were one of the most efficient doctors here with the most overwhelming presence, you were attentive too, but there was an order to excuse you from work and your father was behind it.

- ...

I was exhausted by the dream, Venice's visionary sky, the gaping wound and the song of the Gondolas, while we sat cheek to cheek in the reddish dusk with silver stars scattered in the sky waiting for the moon. The Gondolier echoed his song. The echo of his floating voice made the candle flames flicker.

- It is your fault, how could you, a decent prestigious doctor, of noble origin, of pride and dignity, and the daughter of such a noble man, sympathize with the sick son of such a disreputable family?

(You were the only one who protected me after I had been chased by different faces. To them, I was your doctor but in fact, you were my doctor.)

- Besides, your testimony may not be accepted because of what we are going to testify against this patient.

-

(Ah ... oh my pain...How could they prosecute me so hastily? How could they defeat me so sharply whilst I am a highly qualified doctor from a reputable university with many achievements to my name?

Some things fell in a dark moment of sadness. I took off the white robe of a doctor, tightened the cloak over my body, brought down the veil on my face, and then left the hospital corridors looking for that luxury vehicle waiting for me outside.

Everything fell out the moment the Filipino maid took my handbag and the Indian driver opened the door for me. I handed her some of my papers, and bent to catch my diamond bracelet before it fell under my feet.

The story was not over yet.

(5)

The judge announced the verdict on the 24th of the month.

Despite the fact that I tried to defend you, my testimony was not accepted, I was so frail. I was a former doctor but I was a woman too.

The Judge was a man. My father was a man and even my mother turned into a man.

My brothers were men. Even the female neighbors were men too.

To be continued...

(6)

You were in your fourth prison and I was four months pregnant with a baby from the man who possessed me.

I was his wife and he was my husband.

My husband was still working as a judge; he was your executioner, and you were his prisoner.

The story is over, the vision of «Venice» descends on me every night and I am trapped in a cumbersome painful oppression. I would like to die twice.

Cairo 26/4/1993

**“Never,
It Wasn’t Her!”**

Mohammed Hasan Al-Kuwari

She sat in front of him in the investigation office on the narrow wooden chair, setting her hands on her thighs. The upper part of the chair encircled half of her body. She was unveiled, with short hair, and wearing decent clothes. She was sharply gazing at the empty chair as if she was looking at a person sitting in front of her. Her face looked tired, though she seemed to have hidden many faces behind.

He took a deep breath of smoke then puffed it in her face. She didn't care for the cloud that covered her face; she didn't even move a hand to push it away. Smoke writhed slowly up to the ceiling while a little part infiltrated out of the small upper window.

He stood up to ask her:

- Why did you kill your husband?
- I didn't!
- All clues have suggested that you are the murderer. He had beaten and insulted you in front of people. He had never met his financial obligations towards you; moreover he seized all your money and jewelries; he had never taken you to a hospital, never allowed you to visit your family. Above all he was unemployed...
- Yes, he had done all what you've said, however, I didn't kill him.
- Did he deserve to die? Did you wish him dead?
- Yes, He deserved to die, but I did not push him to.

He stood up again and walked several steps until she was behind him. He was gazing at a picture on the wall; it seemed as if it was exchanging glances with him. He puffed the smoke of his cigarette at the picture then turned to her saying:

- If I had been you I would have killed him long ago. How could you be patient all this time, how could you bear it?
- I couldn't do anything. I am a poor woman; I cannot defeat a man.
- Then, who would benefit from killing him?
- I do not know; there are many enemies!
- Recently, what places did he frequently visit?
- I don't know. I had rarely seen him lately. He would spend two or three nights outdoors.

The detective came close to her and gazed at her face,

- What caused these bruises?
- He did it.
- Although he had passed away two months before!
- A woman's body is not the same as a man's. If she is beaten bruises will not disappear easily.

He showed that he didn't pay attention to the last words. Then he twisted his attitude perhaps he would find another entry.

- Can a woman forgive a man if he beats her?
- Forgive? May be, but she does not forget.
- What about you? Did you forget what your husband had done to you?
- I neither forget nor forgive, but I do not kill.

She rubbed the tip of her nose twice with her forefinger; she looked hesitated before asking him in a low voice:

- Do you beat your wife?

He went on drinking a glass of black tea; his face looked dull while looking at her:

- Who doesn't these days?
- Do you sit with her after you have beaten her?
- No. I can't stand it when her face is full with bruises.

She disapprovingly shook her head.

- How strange! Despite the fact that you are the one who had caused that harm! Do you kiss her afterwards?
- If necessary.
- A necessity or an instinct?
- Instinct is a necessity!

He took out a cigarette half way out of its box and extended his hand to her. She refused by raising her hand.

He didn't light the cigarette he put in his mouth, and asked her:

- Have you heard about women who were murderers, thieves and gangs' heads?
- Yes, I've heard, but I am not one of them.
- Have you heard about women who killed the men they hated?
- No. Rather I've heard of women who killed the men they adored most.
- To which type do you belong?

- None! I'm not a murderer!

He walked around her with his hands crossed at his back.

- Why did you quit your job?
- He forced me to.
- Why?
- To serve and deal with none but him.

- Was your husband a chauvinistic religious man?

- No. He was an alcoholic and a drug addict.

He was drinking up the cold black tea while he kept overturning the papers in his hands feeling bewildered desperate. Then he moved his hands up and announced surrender to despair.

- Although all clues suggest you are the murderer but I have to release you, as I don't have any compelling evidence against you.

She stood up, stretched her body, adjusted her clothes and asked him with no expression on her face:

- Do you wish to see me again?

He was stunned, so he didn't answer.

She was leaving when he stopped her:

- Are you going to remarry?

- Can men do without women?

- I don't think so.

- So we marry them.

He laughed cunningly:

- Who would marry a woman suspected of murdering her husband?

She replied with pride and a sense of mockery:

- Many would. The first of them is your guard Abdel Tawab.

He frowned and kept on pressing the bell button for his doorman for a long time before he moved his finger away.

He said discontented:

- Abdel Tawab? How could you trap him?

She replied firmly:

- I am just a widow, not a Black Widow. At the beginning of the story he sympathized with me; now I feel compassionate about him.

Abdel Tawab entered highly alerted.

The detective yelled at Abdel Tawab pointing at her as an accused murderer:

- Are you going to marry this woman?

- If you allow me, I will.

- Do you know that her husband was murdered?

- Yes sir. I was the first one to know.

- And that she is accused of murdering him?

- But the accused person is innocent until proven guilty.

- Abdel Tawab, aren't you afraid of her, man?

- A man should not be frightened from women, isn't that what you always say, sir?

His tone was colored with despair:

- When are you going to marry her?

- When she finishes her mourning days, legitimately after two months and ten days.

The detective authorized her to leave; she turned and went away. All went after that.

After three months she sat again in front of the detective on the wooden chair which encircled half of her body, with an unveiled face, short hair and decent clothes. Her eyes showed no fear, sitting with one leg crossed over the other, looking at the detective.

He inhaled the smoke of his cigarette then he puffed it away from her face, picked up a pen and started to click on a white paper.

- Who killed your husband Abdel Tawab?

- I don't know!

- We found him dead in your house, woman!

He talked trying to conceal his anger.

- I didn't kill him

She said firmly. He began to walk around her.

- How was he treating you?

- He was a jailer. He couldn't be something better.

- How did you treat him?

- I worked hard to comfort him.

He scraped his head feeling desperation. He muffled his anger and looked straight at her:

- How strange! I have not found any clue against you too. For that you are innocent, you can leave.

She stood up, adjusted her clothes and went out calmly.

After a few steps she was at the office door; he stopped her. She stopped but didn't turn to him. So he stepped towards her, turned around her, till his face became close to hers. He kept a relaxed composure:

- Frankly... I have started to feel at ease with you about your case, I feel pity for you, and I hope to see you again.

She touched both sides of her short hair and a strange smile floated on her exhausted face where many faces hid behind.

A Cold bosom

Hassan Rasheed

We were a group of brothers and cousins, looking for warmth in the biting cold of winter. We found this warmth in her bosom only. She always slept in her usual corner of the room, on her left side. Every day we, the kids, struggled to get closer to the center of warmth. Whenever anyone of my brothers and cousins tried to come close to her, she would push one away with her right hand, or she would jab another in his back. When necessary, she would creep lightly like a fly swatter and slap someone's leg, or let her hand fall heavily on his back. But I always took the closest place to her warmth.

My cousin Ibrahim was the most teasing boy for her; he got her mad most of the times, which was a unique field of joke for us.

Ibrahim used to approach her, then suddenly he would naturally creep into her bosom. She would push him and scream, "Go away, I wish God took you away! ". She often pulled me like a pet rabbit and embraced me to her chest. Soon after that I would ensconce my little back in her bosom and I would feel safe and warm. She would pull my legs with her right hand close to her bosom; I could remember the movement very well, then she would always draw the quilt over me trying to cover my face but I always refused. I felt suffocated; she would then lose her patience and say: "Exactly the same like your father." She went impatiently: "you haven't inherited any gene of him except those of stubbornness and refusal; you are unable to recognize your own benefit".

Brothers, and sometimes cousins, used to creep silently and stealthily towards her, and then in unexpected tender voice she said:

" Well, my children, what do you want to listen to?" I heard nothing but screams of joy, then they would ask to listen to episodes of (Boderiah, donkey Alqaalh, Alvesegerh,...)

There were several and different choices, but there was always a genuine insistence to listen to the same tales. I felt sick of those tales memorized by heart. I hated those ridiculous tales. Grandmother laughed and said pretending cordiality “Inzen, Inzen (well, well).. Ok, I’m ready”. I was silent, and I was the only one who was not involved in expressing an opinion, I was afraid of those stories. Yes, I really was. My grandmother recounted those tales represented by gigantic creatures every time.

I know that you don’t believe that I have met one of them. I saw it with my own eyes once, but yes, I saw “Boderiah” in the faint light of the lighthouse, he was moving, yes, I saw him.

I tried to scream, to do anything, but I did what I hated and feared! The relationship with my grandmother had changed for the first time in my life.

Something bad happened to our relationship. She beat me for the first time, and said sharply: What a boy! We consider you a man but you are a mere kid, Pshaw!” Her words have still been resounding in my head even after all these years. How did I imagine “Boderiah”, or why did I imagine him this way?

My grandmother used to take us with her tales into the deep stormy seas of those tragedies. She was unconsciously creating a world of horror and amazement at the same time. Because we were living besides the sea shore and were a part of that beautiful creature, all these tales related to it were stuck in our memories. In her tales she unconsciously represented the eternal struggle between Good and Evil. She created situations and scenes from nothingness. In our early childhood, we imagined the figure of that “Boderiah”. Ibrahim was the only one who refused tales. He repeatedly said: My grandmother is a liar. Consequently, he was beaten on his feet at the end.

At that time he cursed “Boderiah”, and so did I secretly, because he put an end to my intimate relationship with my grandmother. “Boderiah” was the reason to spoil affection between us. Here is what happened in details.

I was sleeping in her bosom as usual. It was pitch dark and deep silence prevailed. I heard the groans of my grandmother, the breath of some of my sleeping brothers and the coughing of my father who slept in the other room. My father was fond of the bubbling of wastepipes. I wanted to get out to the toilet. I knew the way even if my eyes were closed. I walked, skipped my brothers first and opened the door. As the soot covered all parts of the oil lamp it was gloomy dark, but I proceeded. Suddenly I was riveted as I saw some eyes staring at me. I was startled; however I tried to move or to return, to scream or to run away, to do any possible thing. Actually I was confined, no way. I tried to turn my head but I couldn't. Oh my God, my grandmother would be the victorious in any issue every time by reciting the holy “Sura Yaseen “ from the Holy Qura'an”; but I did not know it. The figure I saw was scary and strange at the same time. It was of a huge head and goggle-eyed. His eyes were as big as a cow's; his ears were as long as a donkey's, but the fingers were very long and had a cat claws. I could only remember the hot breathing that was coming out of his nostrils. I don't know how I stepped back! All I remember is that I skipped some of my brothers but I stepped on some feet and heads of the sleeping children scattered on the ground. Fortunately nobody moaned. I crept into her bosom, I did it.

Unfortunately this incident created a watershed in our relationship. For her I turned to be like the others and I lost some of my privileges. When I tried to come close to her after that, she pushed me away gently.

I looked for another bosom, I said to myself: let it be my mother's. But she was always busy with my little sister. I surrendered to the new actual situation. Soon something new emerged; my mother dragged me with other brothers from my grandmother room, as we called it. Till that moment I hadn't known the reason. Nobody of us asked for an explanation. I thought it was a visit of some cousins to our house.

Some nights I went to her room watching her as she was moaning. Was it because of our separation? Why couldn't she sleep? Why was she moving so slowly?

My mother insisted day and night: "Don't bother your grandmother." Did my mother know about her sickness? Was she afraid that we would catch her disease?

My grandmother was captivated among the four walls of her room. We found ourselves in a new cold winter world again; it was my mother's room. In summer we were in our usual place, the big open hall which separated the two major rooms in the yard of the house (Alliwan), and on the roof too.

One day I came back from school with a great desire to throw myself into my grandmother's bosom. Fortunately, I found nobody in the house, not even my mother. I rushed to grandmother's room, gazed at her; she was asleep. I called her the way I used to: "Ma, Ma" but she didn't answer. I threw myself into her bosom; I was practicing my old rituals. I was eager to be part of that bosom once more. It became mine once more. I pulled her hand gently as usual and I put my head on her arm and I slept. I didn't feel her coldness nor did I notice her silence. Suddenly my mother's screams woke me up. Why was she screaming? I didn't know. Soon I found my father pulling me away and my mother beating me by with both hands.

The most important thing for me is that I still feel the warmth of my grandmother's bosom till now.

* "Boderiah": Alegendary sea God.

Another Woman in My Chamber

Huda Al Noaimi

Talal had never told me anything about his cousin, or about his intention to marry her, until the end of the last academic year, before the university final results which would set us as independent people able to face the difficult flow of rivers of life, because we are as strong as rocks.

For the whole five years Talal and I were always together like twin shadows. We wrote what professors dictated to us in class; then we compared what we had written. To our surprise we always had the same footnotes and the same remarks,; but on this we always commented: “This is normal”.

Everyone we had come across during the five years at university thought that we would return home to announce our engagement then be bound in the sacred eternal tie of marriage. It was so familiar to them to see us sitting in the cafeteria close to the college. If we had disappeared, they would not have searched much for us, but one of them would have uttered some malicious gossip: (Talal must be with Maha). I laughed at hearing the pronunciation of his name in a foreign language; and I often irritated him by saying: “You are to me the hills⁽¹⁾ of home.” He would then become quarrelsome and answer in the same way: “Whatever you say, you are mine”.

I would believe him then and laugh shyly with delight. However I was not delighted when Talal decided to let me know the truth at the time we were supposed to return home. I restrained shyness a while and then became bold enough to refuse to accept his suggestion that he would marry his cousin and wait a few months before rebelling against trivial behavior ,so he could prove his innocence in before the tribe.

(1) The pronunciation of hills in Arabic (telal) is close to pronunciation of his name (Talal)

But the idea was unbearable to me. How could I let another woman to take my place, or to steal the rituals I had created for my own life with Talal?

I refused to endorse his good intentions to satisfy all parties as he said. We didn't return home on the same plane. I returned to my father's house feeling so lonely and looking for his love. My father was the only man whose love for me I didn't suspect and who I'm sure no other woman would take from me like a sudden storm.

News arrived of Talal's wedding. Soon I was deluged with pain and sorrow as if addicted to it. For long years I saw my father as the only man who deserved my love. After my mother had passed away when I was young, he didn't want to marry again. Despite the consistent pressure from all around him, he stayed with me alone. His youth, health and strength seeped out of him, but he regained his energy whenever he saw me more solid with greater ability to give. I was afraid I had let him down when I chose Ahmed to be my husband.

Ahmed was a man of overflowing emotions; his heart always beat with warm love and his words always showed his feelings. He was the president of the national committee that I joined. He was so all impressive, his speech, experience and his supervising of hectic sessions. His considerable acumen enabled him to see hidden details.

I was drained by thinking about Mr. Ahmed and my childlike attempts to analyze his multi-faceted character. I was also thoroughly exhausted by trying to dig deep beyond his morning looks while saying "Good morning Miss". There was a sense of eagerness, but his following words carried a sense of lofty pride. He asked me about the agenda related to the legal view of the next day's meeting as a necessary official procedure. He hung up the phone without any other word. That was exactly what inflamed my contradictory emotions towards him. I felt more respect for him. At the same time I felt a powerful passion

swept through me; spikes of joy grew. Out of my bewilderment, seeds of joy grow on my shy cushion. . My peace of mind was ablaze.

A year passed and the work in the committee was about to end, although I tried many times to delay issuing the final report. But the day would come. Then it came soon, Mr. Ahmed proceeded rapidly and called everybody to a meeting. He offered his and higher authorities' thanks for our efforts in preparing the report. Then he hoped he would have a future chance to collaborate with such an active lively group. We, he and I, were intelligently exchanging hidden looks full of meaning. I was riveted to my seat until everyone went out one by one.

Thank you sir, thank you Mr. Ahmed.

Wait, Miss Maha!

Yes!

You know that I'm already married and I have three children, but I propose to you.

The proposal was not to be refused this time. This time I couldn't impose ideal views on myself; the ideals which I had stopped expecting to exist long ago.

I accepted Ahmed's proposal, despite the unhidden grief of my father, to be the other women in his life. The first wife would stay in her house with her children so there would be no fear or grief.

I accepted to be Ahmed's lover with the approval of society. Society might be discontented, but I would not be put on the black list since I had the position of a wife.

Ahmed's wife accepted the new situation for the sake of her children; yet she decided to get divorced after three months of our marriage. She said she couldn't bear another woman living in the next room. I was

agitated with delight when Ahmed responded, even if he said to her “You will remain important”. Slight regret stung me because I felt delighted and danced with joy. Something shone in my mind; I didn’t know where it came from.

Now my husband became mine alone; He would call my name only and there was no other name to call in the house. It was time to have my man’s whole love with no partner. To live the same image my father engraved in my heart when he refused to replace my mother with another woman even after she had died. It was time for me to sail in my husband’s seas without fear of the dams that might block the waves of our passion. I couldn’t help hiding my joy; it bounced, grew and kept on growing for a year and the one after.

I didn’t give birth to a child and didn’t ask my husband if he wished for a baby from me. It was enough for me that I was the last wife who was never absent, up until Ahmed began to be absent.

My husband began to run away from my delight because it was associated with his grief. The eyes of his children reflected blame and reproach. Every night he resorted to soliloquize and smoke cigarettes at night at the garden of the house.

He seemed unwilling to come to bed in my room, at the same time he began to free himself from the tight besiegement I had surrounded him which might become tighter than that in the year before when we prepared the report. I wanted it to be a pleasant comfortable world, a never-ending flourishing rosy one; but he wanted me to lead an innermost secretive life. I presented myself to all communities as Ahmed’s wife whilst Ahmed was retreating out of my life. I thought his children, who represented his heavenly charming world, were taking him from me. I was patient; I didn’t get angry as they are his first life which was coming back. However, inside me a childish

voice was knocking my heart,” Where is my father?” There was no answer. Nothing to be done; I couldn’t see any help being offered. I knew he was always busy in his work which he loved, but a strong mystical feminine sense was awakened in me. I didn’t know where from. It penetrated all of me and lived in my lungs. I watched Ahmed looking for the child I had known, but I didn’t find him. I asked myself stimulating my creativity vision, but there was no answer. So I became sure that there was no answer for such an obscure question.

May be the right solution was reaching no solution. The absolute thing was what we don’t see; it was the most attractive thing too.

I respected Ahmed’s Silence. I didn’t object to his momentarily willingness to refuse my company and left him to his silence and his precious matters. I kept watching him while my fear became a wandering gull and my misgivings grew gigantically.

One day he stopped me while I have not cleared the tea cups away yet: Maha! I would like to talk to you about something but I don’t know how to begin!

I felt torn to pieces, and then replied:

- I know Ahmed! There is another woman!

The First Time Silence

Turfah Al-Naimi

They locked the door because they were quarreling but in a very low voice, actually it was like whispering.. “Silence”, that tied them for years, was defending its fatalistic existence at that time. They were afraid that someone might accidentally catch a word about their secret, so they sometimes stopped talking, but some other times truncated painful phrases saturated with much jealousy and anger seeped out, the matter that broke the bonds of friendship between the three women who were one day at the same school in a remote village somewhere. They used to share the last row in the same class room and were involved together in the imposed silence. They never sought after who imposed it because they were many people who did so. Their silence grew; it became their fourth friend. “Silence” shared their first grade teachers’ room. They came back as teachers to the same school they were at as students.

Their silence colluded with sweet illusion, so they turned a blind eye at the remote looks the guard of the school sent stealthily. They built great love stories out of his short phrases and smiles he sent out whenever he saw them; they kept raising these stories up secretly for a long time; whereas the guard, in fact, could see them only as daughters , so smiled to them ; he was unable to remember their names.

They conflicted over him. They all damned silence; each one of them swore that she would tell him about their conflict over him, but he drove his car away. At that day, a loud scream split hearts and silence; all people in the school were screaming; the sky exploded raining; thunder boomed all over the area; heavy water poured from everywhere. Their moaning and weeping, mingled with tears, swept away all what they intended to say; it was useless to say anything anymore. Speech escalated in the air to search for a way to breathe.

Their bodies got together, then startled everyway looking for an exit. The three women were imprisoned in the first stage teachers' room, while all others jostled towards the yards.

The proceeding angry torrent carried away doors, windows and anything which could be a hideout. They were struggling against death waiting in the open; all talks were delayed. It was more than a mere death. It was sweeping them, their voices together with their feeling of safety. They struggled for their existence, so they tried to manipulate it.

Their hands met, then entwined, but dispersed again. Their voices supported each other sometimes as if they were coming from one throat, then they quarreled; each one of them trying to have the loudest voice.

The angry torrent drifted one of them away from her other two friends; they were now out of sight; their voices died away. She collided with the door of the guard's room. She began to swim but she realized that one of her ribs was broken. She began to collapse under water. Water was going into her lungs while she was sinking down. She was drowning in the unknown.

She opened and closed her mouth several times trying to scream, at the same time she remembered her teacher who had taught the three of them to be always silent. She wished she could grip her neck.

"Did you hear their screams and cries? Do you still recognize the voices of the students whom you taught to be silent for the first time? Or are voices mixed in your head now? Our little village was overwhelmed with flood; did you hear the throaty wounded voice of Nora mixed with tears? Or did you hear Mariam scream tearing her chest while looking for an exit?"

However silence was rising up inside me so rapidly.

The most frightful thing for her was death. To die alone in a remote place where nobody knew about her was so horrible, so she clutched at the window tightly. It seemed to her she heard the rescue-men approaching the same window she was clutching at from inside. Hearing the sounds filled her heart with hope, but she realized that her chance of survival was almost lost if she left the room. But she didn't feel like stopping being silent even for the first time in her entire life. She felt she didn't want to die before telling everybody about what is hidden inside her for or a long time. She gathered her strength and summoned her voice which lay dormant in the silence of years and screamed out of the window to survive.

“Tell them I'm dying!”

A deep feeling of peace overwhelmed her when it occurred to her that her voice would survive even after her death. She felt she could die peacefully, but a voice from outside told her:” we are dying too.”

Once Upon a Time

Bushra Nasir

04/25/1988 Baghdad

(A human being is just a bunch of secrets. His reality or his actual character is decided by his deeds and not by his words at all.)

I left the museum, saturated with a fresh fragrance of history. Walking aimlessly, I intended to give myself as a prey to the wide roads decorated with cypress and palm trees, which swallowed me fiercely.

I didn't know how long I had been walking among tall buildings and low houses. I didn't want to know the time; not that I wanted to intentionally ignore it, but because my goal was to look for something new. I had always been busy looking for something which can trigger the joy of discovery inside me, regardless of how trivial that thing might be.

I might have been after a feeling of wonder; I honestly don't know. Things that amaze me might not mean anything or might not draw any attention of anyone else. I enjoy looking, for instance, at balconies with washing hanged there. I look closely at the washing trying to create my own bets. I not only try to guess the number of people living in that house, but I also try to know their inclinations, desires, and nature by observing the pattern of the clothes and the way they are hanged.

Observing the details in other people's lives can distract me, to a great extent, from being occupied by my bitter defeats and lost battles. I might be saying this only to justify that great curiosity which has accompanied me all my life. This curiosity had always been and will always be the reason of visiting second hand shops, where used clothes and old books are sold, and shops selling empty bottles. I looked for smells of human beings left behind the same way heroes and losers

leave their imprint on history. It is extremely enticing for me to look for something in other people's things, or more precisely to look for a piece of their soul unintentionally left with their waste and litter.

I get the same feeling of wonder if I, by chance, see drunk or homeless people at night picking up cigarette butts thrown by passers-by. For me, catching a glimpse of lovers hiding away, stealing a kiss or a touch, it unfolds endless stories of stolen love.

By adopting the habit of observing details in people's lives and houses, I might be trying to compensate myself for its losses and for the loss of intimate affection which was wrenched from me one day taking a piece of my soul.

Putting aside attempts to philosophizing matters or explaining them stupidly and naively, people often leave sweet or bitter shadows of their lives in their belongings and even their waste. They also leave afterimages of their defeats, ruins and passion in places and clothes and everywhere around them.

I kept walking from one alley to another; my hands were in the pockets of my light summer jacket. I intended not to do any specific thing but ways led me to a long alley, along which streams of stinking water spread out.

The state of the alley was clear from the first glance. people there hardly earned a living. The design and construction of old high-walled houses indicated their poverty.

There were clamor, noise, screaming and voices ascending behind the open windows. A woman was standing behind the window looking around grumbly as if waiting for the right moment to explode with anger. Suddenly another older woman appeared shouting loudly at her son who was urinating in the stinking water surrounded by half naked children who immersed their legs in mud.

I was still looking at the houses, which looked calm in spite of the noise, when heads stretched out from windows and fences started looking at the strange visitor. Obviously I was not welcomed.

I smiled at them to give a gesture of a good intention or an apology for my curiosity. Meanwhile a common smell, made up of a mixture of hot cooked food, cow dung with the smell of damp houses sneaked into my nose. I thought of moving forward to the end of the alley where I might find an exit to avoid leading them to be more hostile, especially that I started to notice signs of anger and surprise on the women's faces, as well as some filthy expressions from the children. I also felt embarrassed when I heard one of the stretched heads commenting, 'oh no...., she must be here to take pictures of us... she might be a journalist....'

Upon hearing this, I put down my camera and hid it inside my bag. These people live in a common atmosphere of satisfaction. Sharing simple food with love and solidarity let them feel great as if they were having a feast at the top of the world.

I was so nervous. I felt shame that I felt like sweat was oozing from my armpits. You can't understand these feelings unless you go through a similar situation. There I was, looking like someone trying to steal from these people the serenity, beliefs and what they were accustomed to by sneaking into their life. So I urged my pace to run away from their relentless stares, which were following me penetrating my back and almost lashing me.

Then a small, worn-out sign drew my attention. I could hardly see what was badly written on it Hammam Al-Afiah, or The Healthy Public Bath. The sign was hanged using an old jute string on the front of an old, low and shabby house which looked more like a grave.

I pondered the old house and looked around wondering: Was there any connection between this place and that mystery-filled traditional tale which I used to hear during my childhood?

I have forgotten most of the details, but as far as I can remember, the story I heard as a child revolved around a public bath for women. The story was called Hammam Al-Aleel, the Refreshing Public Bath, so I wonder whether this bath was called after the folk tale, or the folk tale was actually about this place.

As you might expect, I could not simply forget about that place and carry on without being madly following the urge of curiosity. But how would I know if there were people taking bath inside this place. It might be haunted by jinn and ghosts. Who knows? I turned back hoping to hear something, which could either prove or disprove my skepticism and fears and stop me or do the opposite, but I didn't hear anything.

The half-naked boys were still uttering obscenities while their legs were still immersed in mud. Reading the attached sign gave me the feeling that an ambiguous magical force was drawing me inside like a huge magnet. The magical force became stronger and stronger urging me to go into this world, no matter what.

I pushed the shabby wooden door and saw a flight of stairs leading to the bottom. The steps were small and broken, made of old concrete. The lower one I went, the darker it got.

I went down to find another door. I push it cautiously; I couldn't hear anything except my heart beating like a drum.

What kind of place was it meant to be as low as a crypt? Why was it under the ground like a cellar? If it was a public bath as the sign claims, how could I know that it was for women not men?

However, I convinced myself that if this place was designed for men, it wouldn't need to be secretly situated at the bottom of all these narrow paths and dark stairs. Male nudity is somehow accepted; or it is even obscenely celebrated, one might think.

I stopped at the half opened door clapping my hands in order to draw someone's attention, but nobody responded. I tried twice and three time before slightly pushing the door to see a flabby fat woman dressed in black. I heaved a deep sigh; I had an unjustified feeling of triumph.

I was frightened and trembled at the sight of the fat woman, who looked like fairy tale witches. I was startled at her sudden appearance to the extent I felt a shiver riding my spine. She had a big nose which seemed hooked like a witch's nose. The pale orange light, coming from a dangling lantern, reflected pale shades on the woman's face much more than it did on other things.

The woman looked like one of the characters of folk tales which my mother used to tell us. Upon hearing these stories, we used to be too scared to go to the toilet even though our bladder was about to burst. We were afraid to face such eyes, coming out suddenly from corners and holes like cockroaches.

"What? How can I help you?" said the woman calmly; her voice was coming from deep inside her throat.

"I would like to try", I replied, pretending courage.

She stood guffawing; the whole place, while I stared at the weird tattoo on her chin.

She disappeared; or rather was swallowed by darkness. Then, she came back holding a towel, a bar of Aleppo soap and a sponge. Before I could stretch my hand to take the bathing set which were going to

make this day a glorious and historic one, she said in vexation, “our price is four Dinars, apart from the price of the sponge and the soap... everything has a price.”

“Yes, sure”, I coldly replied and gave her the money.

Scared and hesitated I took the bathing set and followed her. I quivered as I remembered her cackling laugh.

She led me through a narrow way into another, until we ended up at a big wooden door. When she pushed it, hot steam escaped out and loud voices of women laughing could be heard. It was such a relief to hear these women’s clamoring noise.

Darkness and warmth prevailed in the place. It was difficult to see anything at the beginning, but then I got used to that. I took off my summer jumper and sat down on a little concrete step trying to regain my cheerful mood.

Three oranges rolled out of a paper bag by my side. A little child was lying down sucking food from a soda glass bottle used as a feeding bottle. Being surrounded by naked women was not comfortable; that sight had a heavy clench on my heart.

Why did I come into this place? What kind of madness led me into it?

The smell of soap, the cracking sound of copper water bowls, the clip-clopping of wooden slippers, the hot water taps, the concrete water basins and the billowing steam were all too tempting for me to resist. They had the same sense of awe that my mother’s tales used to have.

“Come on... join us,” one of the women said.

Following my curiosity and sense of excitement was already a reckless decision. But now that I had my adventure, was I supposed to take off my clothes and join the herd of naked women, this mass celebration of nudity?

I felt ashamed, as I had always taken baths in my own bathroom, in a bath tub behind a curtain hiding me from the rest of the bathroom.

What did I have in common with these women? Some of them may have come here for a bath after a long and tiring week. Some may have been village brides who came to try the public bath of which they had always dreamt of just like I did, but for a different reason. Others could have been getting ready for a Thursday night which is quite special for women in the orient.

A sixteen years old girl sat in front of me. She splashed water from her braids on me while she was combing the water off her hair using a wooden comb. I pretended to be busy taking off my necklace, just to avoid looking at her naked body. She seemed indifferent to the signs of puberty which had recently bloomed on her body. A thousand questions went into my head about the restrictions forced on the body by civilization.

“Are you married?” I asked amicably

“Only two months ago.....I am still a newly-wed bride”, She replied shyly.

“A married woman in our country is a bride until she gives birth to her first baby”, I commented.

I always promise myself that I won’t fall into the trap of familiarity with strangers. But I always break my promise and suffer the consequences. This girl was a proof assuring my defeat because I couldn’t keep my promise to myself; she suddenly stretched her hand and snatched my necklace to examine it in brazenly.

“Come here, aren’t you tempted by the steam?” shouted an old woman.

Others repeated the same invitation. They looked really friendly.

I plucked up my courage and put aside my shyness and complexity, then joined them after leaving my skirt and shirt close to my bag on the small concrete short wall.

I brought my bath set and sat next to them with my legs crossed. But I soon lost my desire for the steam and hot water, when they started piercing my body with sharp looks in a way similar to the way I was observing the statue of goddess Inanna-Ishtar at the museum I had just left.

“Ask the masseuse to come to loosen your muscles”, one woman said. Another one exclaimed “Glory be to God!” while a third muttered, “I did not know that city girls can be shy...” and a fourth one agreed, “true! I have never seen anyone taking a bath with her clothes on”. I could only keep myself busy by pouring water on my hair.

While my eyes were closed and soap foam was covering my face, I felt a body approaching me. I started to shiver then opened my eyes to see a naked body of a fat woman next to me. She crept closer until I could see her round and wet face and her narrow eyes. “Where is it from?” she said in a hissing voice.

“What?” I asked as I stepped backward.

“The bra, it is very beautiful; it must be from abroad”, she said.

“What on earth led me to this herd of nude women? And what madness drove me to join this celebration of triviality?”

Back in my country, I used to hate those who chewed tobacco and spitted it on the road in a shocking and disgusting manner. I also used to get very annoyed after watching a television programme called ‘Around the World’. I even thought of phoning the presenter and complaining to her asking to stop showing harrowing scenes of diseases, destruction and famines. Now that I was there, I was experiencing something

more annoying than seeing the tobacco-spitting or watching scenes of horror: it is the fact that I had become a subject of amusement to these women who forgot about their bath and surrounded me. One of them peeled an orange with her thick nails and gave it to me in a gesture of a good will. Another woman was amused to see my water proof watch. “Foreign products are always better. Local nail polish soon peels off”, a third woman commented.

I tried to find a way to get out of this awkward situation quickly. I wanted to run away from this place especially now that the new bride started singing a sensual song with a touching voice, while other women joined her by clacking their copper bowls as one of them started to dance, shaking her flabby, naked body.

I could not stand all this. I had never joined women in any kind of celebration before. So I left them to their amusement and delight and started drying my hair and wrapping the towel around my body.

“Come back again,” one of them shouted.

“When you come next time take off all your clothes”, said another.

The child was still sucking the food while asleep, and the oranges were still rolling out of the bag. But my belongings were missing! My handbag, my camera, and my skirt and shirt.....

I looked around then went to ask the fat story teller, who claimed that she didn’t know anything.

I went back to search close to the taps and basins area before shouting very loudly, “I have been robbed”.

Naked women surrounded me, as I tried not to collapse.

“Oh, my goodness! Was there a lot of money in the bag?” shouted one of them as she hit her chest.

“Everything...everything, my passport, camera and many other personal stuff”, I said.

“Oh God, even your clothes have vanished!” murmured the bride.

I then burst into tears, as if I had just realized how serious the problem was.

The bride patted me on the shoulder and said, “I can give you some of my clothes!”

Amid all the screaming and shouting, the witch-like woman came in. “You are thieves; you have stolen my belongings”, I said. “What? We stole you be...?” She burst out in fury. “What can I do now? How can I get out?” I asked helplessly. “How can I go back to my country?”

“We have been in business for thirty years and we have a very good reputation.” She said, shaking with anger. “Isn’t it enough that we get rid of your filth?”

“Please, do something...call the police,” I pleaded.

“I won’t leave this place before I get back my belongings.” I said with determination.

She was unimpressed and pursed her lips then murmured: “We are no thieves”.

I cried my eyes out as I begged, but nothing could change her mind. When I tried to threaten her with the police, she burst out in anger as if stung by a scorpion and attacked me and smacked my face hysterically.

I soon found myself out in the alley, heartbroken, running away wearing a village girl’s clothes. The public bath owner had kicked me out and spat on my face shouting, “strangers bring nothing but troubles”.

Wolves in Our Village

Lulua Binali

**(The story won Rashid bin Hamaid Award for Culture and Science
2010, ranked second)**

The sun shone brightly from its celestial window over the small village at the foot of the mountain. It was the end of a long winter which seemed never-ending to everybody. On the outskirts of the village, a cottage whose rooms were built by a mixture of red bricks from the city, and time-worn decayed timber, laid down.

My mother woke us up for school unusually early. Her loud voice was deafening as it reached my sister and me in the corner of our room. She was shouting at us from the kitchen while she stood by the boiling water pot hanging over the fire. As the steam billowed from the pot, it gathered near the ceiling forming a smokescreen and hiding the imperfections of the worn-out ceiling. “Come on! Wake up. The bus is not coming today. A rock fall has blocked the main road to the village.” my mother shouted.

I sat up in the bed lazily, my eyes still closed. A sudden shiver went through my body as I asked myself, “How did my mother know about the rock fall? My father hasn’t come back yet since he left with my brother “Saleh” to sell our crop of lentil at the neighboring village Kalba. My mum is weird; she is always the first one to know what is going on in the village, even before Hamdaan the mayor and his men do.” I dragged myself out of the bed and moved towards the bathroom, having reached the conclusion that my mother must have a magical way of knowing all about what is happening in the village. She might be getting her information from the fireplace and the pot in front of which she spends most of the day.

I brushed my hair feeling afraid of” Saleh” going to school alone, as “Saleh” used to accompany my sister and I when the bus broke down, or when the roads are blocked. Many rock falls had happened on that winter. People get happy when it rains, but all we get from the rain

were these landslides and rock falls causing roads to block, and as a result we had to walk long distances to reach the school or the nearest shop to buy some sugar or cheese. I couldn't finish my cup of hot milk and one bite of bread was enough for my upset stomach. It was upset because of the cold or more likely because I was too scared to go to school without my brother "Saleh». I dragged my bag with one hand and held my little sister's hand with the other.

My mother stopped us before leaving to check our clothes. Her face was always neutral; one could never tell whether she is sad or happy. She laid my scarf in a way to cover the feminine features starting to bloom on my childish body. She gave us our packed lunch for school break time. Before letting us go, she gave us the usual stern warnings which she uttered slowly while her eyes widened and her eyebrows lifted. "Beware of road wolves", she said in a hoarse but whispering voice. She nodded slowly as if to say that we both knew very well who these wolves were and on which roads they prowled".

I started to be more scared and worried about myself and my little sister. I briefly pondered the idea of staying at home and not going to school but I immediately dismissed it; there is no way we can avoid going to school, as my mother would never allow it for any reason.

Before setting off to the freezing morning outside, I took a deep breath from inside our warm and humble cottage. The sun outside was cold, hiding behind a band of clouds promising more wet roads, and more rock falls.

The scent of wet grass in the morning gave me a feeling of bliss as well as great power to start my journey. Our shoes left traces as we walked very carefully on the slippery and muddy paths to avoid falling or getting stuck into the small water puddles caused by the rain. My eyes were restless looking around for a hiding wolf or any sign of it. We kept plodding on down the long path which stretched from the foot of the mountain to the school at the other end of the village. We

entertained ourselves by sometimes sharing incoherent, uncorrelated comments to see our breaths coming out of our mouths in the cold. Other times we were silent as our eyes were fixed on the scattered tiny flowers, which grew on the two sides of the muddy path, trying to survive from human and animal steps and protect their life whose span was as short as the beautiful spring.

“Beware of the road wolves!” My mother’s warning echoed in my head when I passed by the house of our nearest neighbor ‘Um Ali’. I visualized her face and her teeth which wobble whenever she opened her mouth. The door of Um Ali’s cottage was wide open as usual, so that she can watch people passing by on the road. She was not bothered about the cold wind that kept fiddling with the thin perforated curtain on her door. Her fat chickens were merrily picking seeds from the soft soil. I quickened my pace while firmly holding my sister’s hand to avoid Um Ali spotting us but no avail. She soon saw us and shouted for us to wait. She followed us slowly in heavy steps. Her trousers dangling beneath her winter dress were soaked with water from the puddles. When she reached us, she was tired of the few steps she had taken, but she put in our hands some pink peanuts. She was panting when she asked us why we were going to school on foot. We told her about the rock fall and she was surprised because her son Ali went to work at dawn. “Who told your mother?” she asked, bewildered. I was not sure whether she was asking us or asking herself, so I smiled and moved on leaving her question hanging in the air, as we didn’t have an answer.

“Let Um Ali think whatever she likes”; my mother is a gifted woman. We carried on and gladly ate our pistachio pulps. We were watching the columns of smoke rising from cottages at the foot of the mountain, and into the clouds. It seemed to me that all these grey clouds gathering in the sky were made up of the smoke ascending from the cottages.

There were beautiful flock of pigeons whose feathers glowed as the sun shone. White feathers turned black then black ones turned white as sunshine poured on and off.

The road became so quiet and silence prevailed everywhere. We could hear nothing but our panting, our breath coming in short gasps because of the long way and the heavy school bags on our shoulders.

The road became somewhat declivitous as Uncle Salem's shop appeared at the bottom of the road. His skinny donkey seemed to have accepted its fate and surrendered to the rope which tied it to a post behind the shop.

I examined the place as we approached and passed by its door. I saw colorful balls for children and straw brooms hanging on both sides. I couldn't see any of the coal bags which he usually put outside. We managed to pass the shop, without being seen by Uncle Salem or any of his early-morning customers. We went very carefully holding each other's hands and quickening our pace. We kept looking around to check whether there were any hiding wolves. How could we recognize the wolf if we come across one? I had never seen a wolf before. I once heard a wolf howling when I went with my father and my brother "Saleh" looking for our camel which ran away to the distant forest. My brother "Saleh" said that it mostly looked like a dog.

We continued along the steep road as if invisible hands were pushing us from behind. The rustling sound of the butterflies' wings was filling the air. The butterflies had started to come out of their cocoons on the trees that started to shed their heavy loads of leaves and became half naked suffering under the weight of all these cocoons.

We suddenly came across a herd of sheep crossing the road right in front of us with "Shammas", the only shepherd in the village. He was knocking the ground with his rod every now and then in order to show them the way. His mad brother Hamid followed him like his shadow. He slowed down and looked blankly at us, while we stuck our hands into the fleece of the little lambs which were trying to catch up with their mothers at the back of the herd. We carried on walking after the herd went away. Their bleat dissolved into the grey clouds in the sky

and nothing was left of them except the marks of their hooves and some scattered clumps of dung.

Cold drops of rain had started to fall when we passed by the café where the elderly men of the village usually sat. It was also the place where the jobless spent their time. They have hot drinks, or eat some food. The rattan chairs scattered inside and outside the shop were empty except for three chairs where three old men were drinking tea in glass cups. I noticed that Uncle Humam was gazing at me with a smile, twirling his moustache. I don't know why, but his image conjured up the wolf in my mind. Something inside me, I didn't know its source, was telling me that this man was the wolf my mum warned us about. I held my sister's hand firmly trying to get some reassurance to calm down my racing heart beats. Her hand almost slipped off mine because it became sweaty despite the cold. An extreme feeling of fear overwhelmed me upon seeing Uncle Humam checking me out while twirling his white moustache with his yellow skeletal fingers, biting his lower lip. His looks reminded me of an ageing and hungry beast. I pulled my sister's hand then we started running. I didn't care about the wet roads or about falling down and getting our clothes muddy.

I usually saw Uncle Humam with my dad and brother "Saleh" as he helped them during harvest. When my mother knew that Uncle Humam was with them, she used to prevent us from taking lunch to my father and brother in the field. She would rather wait until my brother "Saleh" came asking why the food was late. She would give him the tiered food container, not bothering to even give him an explanation. He would not be waiting for an answer, anyway.

Our breathing went back to normal as the café and its customers disappeared in the distance behind us. The grip in our clutched hands went soft. I looked at my sister and saw that she was glad to be walking slowly again. She looked up at me and with a lovely smile as if we were congratulating ourselves on surviving of the wolf. She moved her eyes to look at a flock of small yellow birds which had just perched

on the boughs of a nearby tree to shake their yellow plumage dry after the rain.

We had just one little wooded area to cross before reaching school. The smell of wet burning wood was filling the Forest Mountains. The songs of nearby birds were echoing in the air. We carried on and tried to chase fear away by singing a folkloric song we heard on tape recorder of my father. He used to place the recorder next to him on his chaise lounge, under the lemon tree. He would listen to it in cool summer nights as he smoked his shisha. The music would make him gleeful and he would let out sighs of joy as he puffed the smoke. These songs used to reach our ears mixed with the smell of lemon blossom and shisha smoke.

The white building of the school finally appeared before our eyes. It had been a police station originally. When the police moved to a new place, this became a separate girls-only school. Before that, boys and girls went to the same school.

The building was shrouded in silence on the outside and the main gate was closed. I started to wonder why there were no girls rope-skipping, or fighting over the only swing in the school, made from a car tire hanging from the big tree. Why were there no little girls playing and running before the bell rings and forces them to rush inside? We were approaching the gate quickly when Saber, the school janitor, saw us from his room window. He looked astonished at the sight of us, but I saw his looks change before my eyes. He looked at me as a drooling wolf looks at his prey. It was the exact same look that Uncle Humam had. He looked both right and left to check that no one was around, and then tried to force us inside his room. I caught my sister's hand ever so firmly and I dragged her as fast as I could, trying to make as much noise as I could. My mother's words were ringing in my head as loudly as her mortar and pestle which she used to grind her seeds. We dropped our bags on the ground and ran as far as we can. My mum had forgotten, as had I, that the day was a holiday.

Eid Day

Jamal Fayez

(1)

It was the first time he got out of his home without having a look at the palm tree which his great-grandfather had planted its shoot years ago. His sons and grandsons took care of it many years after. He had enjoyed the good-taste of its fruits for a long time before it stopped to bear few years ago. His grief about it grew and intensified his pain, but he did not lose hope. He kept on taking care of it most of his time, except for this night; he was short of time; he had to buy many things. The most important things to buy were the fruits, pomegranate, the most favorite kind of fruits to his son, and apple, the favorite to his daughter. He bought candy and “Alrahish”^{*} too. Then he spent his night cleaning the guests’ hall and setting the table.

(2)

It was not his habit to get up early, but he did that day He awakened his servant, then returned to his room, wore clean clothes, sprayed perfume and went out leaning on his grandfather’s stick feeling pride.

^{*}(Al Rahash) a kind of sweets

(3)

In Al-Eid he went to the same mosque; sit in the same place he used to sit in in his early childhood with his father and his grandfather. He gazed at the faces of people coming in and looked at the faces of those who were sitting right and left. Some people inside began to congratulate him; others asked him about the secret of chagrin on his face.

The place crowded with prayers. All rose to pray; he did the same like them. Imam began to preach about the The Eid. He was looking at faces from time to time he might find people he belonged to.

People began to get out of the mosque, he riveted to his place staring at faces, haunted by the desire to wail while gazing at people passing by him looking at him too. Tears filled his eyes ; once he was about to come close to talk to them they ignored him and kept walking to get out of the mosque talking to each other.

(4)

He returned to his house, possessed by sadness. He came close to the Palm tree; his ear touched its trunk. Suddenly he began to beat it by his fist; his body shuddered and he got a feeling of helplessness which doubled his sorrow. He beat it once more and then twice, third, fourth...Now he believed his intuition that the trunk is hollow. He murmured:

“Allah suffices, and he is my best deputy”

(5)

He sat alone at the table mill around, cutting some pomegranates and apples with trembling hands. He inserted the knife in the dessert and then in Alrhish aimlessly. His servant entered, so he whipped the tears off his cheeks. The servant cleared his throat before saying: “Sir.. You are tired! Do you want me to be with you or to go to sleep?”

He didn’t answer him. He remained staring at the table before he pointed to him to approach and sit beside him to share him his food.

Al Doha February 1998

Horses and Violet Universes

Dalal Khalifa

Universe is a purple dream. Music has a different taste here; the neighing horses can be heard from a distance, there, near waterfalls descending from the hidden heights. Waterfalls together with violet visions outflowing on the place impart a fascinating isolated beauty. Distant Neighing suggested that horseback caravans would soon appear running on the clouds. The eyes of people fixed looking up at the sky waiting for the horses convoys. They finally appeared, springing one by one causing great bang sounds associated with the appearance of each of them, and then it would soon disperse and fall like playful lights. All gasped of admiration and pleasure. Nobody saw a wedding like that before.

“Violets” smiled to herself in the mirror. She was as beautiful as the flower which she named after. The finishing touches of the makeup made her look like a violet dream; her white dress color mingled with a slight nice shade of violet; her wreath was of jasmine and violets too. When she would go to the yard where all guests gathered, the dream was to come true and completed by the entry of the handsome bridegroom on the horse’s back. The way he entered wasn’t her idea, it was originally the idea of the man she was about to marry before. It was for their wedding ceremonies at that time. However she liked the idea so much although they didn’t get married, as it represented all she loves in this life and formulate her character known to people, so she used it exactly the same way as a part of her own wedding ceremonies after that.

She was proud of her name “Violet” which her father had chosen; the meaning of the name threw some shadows over her character; so she felt it was fair to highlight it in her wedding ceremonies. She inherited

her parents' great passion towards horses. Her father liked to relax in his armchair in front of TV and tell the story of his admiration for her mother, over and over again, when he saw her for the first time in a horses race in Kuwait, and how he didn't return to Doha without her and how he didn't feel easy until she shared him his passion about horses.

Violet smiled again when she imagined her husband about to enter her vast yard on the back of the good mare «Dreams». The first option was « Dreadful », her favorite horse, but her husband feared the adventure; he reluctantly accepted to enter his wedding party that way; he wanted not to spoil the night , so he warned her he might be forced to give the horse some sedatives or he would ask Kumar the hostler to hold it in case of any emergency.

She felt sorry that her husband was not fond of horses the way she was, so he hadn't learnt riding horses before, even he didn't feel safe while being on a horse back, unless it was under the control of the hostler. But nevertheless she loved him as he was, for love turns, as usual, the demerits of the beloved into something nice that ignites love.

Her heart was banging; she was about to leave to the event place, where everybody was waiting for her full of either longing or curiosity or both. Her close friend adjusted the wreath over her head, on her silky wavy hair. Everything was perfect; she has now to get out cheerfully with her charming smile. Melodies outside changed to notify her presence while the neighing of horses with the water babbles were drawing an audial scene behind. Suddenly her phone rang.

Her servant told her that there was a present brought for her by someone who insisted that she should take it now. Alright, she could postpone her walking out one more minute, but her friend gave a sigh showing uneasiness:

- It is not the time of seeing presents; people are waiting for you eagerly!

- One minute Noor. Please open the door for Jolly, I can't move quickly in this dress.

Jolly gave Noor an old metal box tied with a gifts ribbon.

“Violets” asked”:

- Who brought it, Madam?

- Mr. Rashid.

Noor turned her head quickly when she heard the name.

Don't receive it “Violets”!

She pushes the gift to the servant again:

- Give it back to him, Is he still here?

“Violets” turned to her servant with great astonishment:

- Has he brought it by himself Jolly?

- Yes Madam, but he has gone.

“Violets” leapt to her feet holding the tail of her dress and rushed to receive the present, but Noor hands were faster to snatch the box; “Violets” was upset.

- Give it to me please!

- Violets! You are the wife of another man now! Time of Rashid had finished. On the other hand this doesn't promise well.

The maid ran away of the tension and closed the door quietly behind her leaving “Violets” trying to grab the present from her friends hands.

- Noor, trust me. Fahd is the only man I want. I can notice only him out of others. If I had wanted Rashid I would have not left him for

Fahd. Do you understand? Give me that box; I want just to see what is inside it.

The box was very light, as if it was empty, the matter that aroused “Violets” curiosity. Her fingers began to loosen its ribbon immediately once she returned to her place in front of the mirror. The box was empty, but actually there was a letter in. Noor was begging:

- Please do not read it, not now. I feel it is....

“Violets”:

Today, I was trying to divert my thoughts away of the issue of your marriage. I spent the whole day in the stable because, like you, I rush to horses only at times of joy and at times of sorrow. A furious rage overwhelmed me; I was swept by the worst emotions you can imagine for what you’ve done to me. What increases my anger is that I couldn’t express it and make you understand what I feel. In a certain moment, all that overwhelming rage led me to feel a wild desire to send you something for the occasion, something that expresses what I think of you and of that moron.

Do you know what I wanted to send you? I felt a wild desire to offer you the droppings of the mare that was swaying in front of me at that moment. I wanted to send the dropping in this box because they are exactly what the occasion deserves your marriage to this mean creature. But, despite all attempts to force myself to do it, I couldn’t because, alas, my tact is much more refined to allow me. Hence, it was sufficient to send this empty box that was supposed to contain the thing that most expresses my feelings at the moment towards both of you as a couple. I would leave it to your imagination to visualize the idea I want to express by this present.

A note: Did you tell me once that your Second husband (or may be the first) was your worst choice? I think you need to update this information!

Rashed

“Violets” stood shocked. She was distraught after reading these words. Noor drew the letter out of her fingertips, torn it and threw it with the box in the trash.

A disgusting man! I told you not to read it, didn’t I? Look at yourself now!

“Violets” wiped her tears and tried to stop crying. It went out of control; all her body shuddered.

- “Violets”, please! We don’t have time for this now. Wash up your face and let’s put make up. Do you want to spoil your wedding party? Do you want him to win by getting what he intends to?

- Wretch! How could he say I don’t deserve it but....

- Let him say whatever he wants to say! Do you think he would send you a bouquet of roses rewarding you for leaving him for the sake of another man, and that man is smarter than him? What is important now is that you have to forget everything but your wedding party. Your husband will shortly come. Don’t let him wait outside. You know he will be so worried while waiting riding the horse back.

- Wretch! Wretch! Criminal! Have you noticed the poison he tuck in every word? Have you noticed how he ended his message?

* * *

All heads there turned around looking at her while walking with ease and gentleness in a carefully chosen dress; everything about her was

beautiful; flowers petals, basil leaves and ululations scattered in her way; but there was something which might burn out after she received that present.

* * *

They sat on the wet sand at the beach. Noor was drawing circles on the sand and write meaningless words, and “Violets” was making three dimensioned figures (models) of sand. Noor lifted her eyes to her:

- Is there any hope?

“Violets” denied it by shaking her head, Noor kept silent.

She might be the only person in the world who knew that “Violets” has good reasons this time in being determined to get a divorce only two years after her marriage, because she knew well how much her friend loved that man and how stubbornly she contended to keep up his image in her own eyes and in the eyes of others, and how hard she struggled to save her marriage.

Therefore, she felt it would be better for her to put an end to this poor marriage despite the legendry wedding ceremonies she’s had. Noor had witnessed her friend transforming to a different person, identifying with the man she loved, in order to save their marriage and keep him with her, despite his infidelity which she tried to cover up after failing to put an end to, till it was revealed to all, and till covering it up would have be nothing but humiliation, she had been in an unbearable suffering of misery.

But humiliation doesn’t fit her; only vigor and joy do. It was a part of her beauty to stand with raised head, like a mare.

I used to ride horses almost every day to find myself in a world of my own, a limitless space entirely mine. There are many spaces where one

might fly high all alone which are unable to be described to others, such as that rear world, now-vague-now-sparkling, that appears only on the mirrors of a car, the retreating building, the gigantic illuminated eyes that chase me in the dark, sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrifying, sometimes idiotic or funny. Has it, ever, occurred to anyone that the light of the cars lamps moving behind you while you are driving home might make you laugh in the dark?

Violets cast away trying to understand the universe secrets and mysteries.

I miss my own spaces, all my wide spaces which I gave up for his sake. When I minded my heedlessness I realized that I didn't mean anything to him, but when I saw it was better for me to return to my world I discovered that he was prepared to usurp it. I was shocked; it was after all the great love I gave to him. He doesn't deserve me!

I feel that he considered me like a luxury car of huge potentials he had won in a lottery, so he parked me in the garage, not to keep me with him as always expected of the selfishness of love we know, but to sell me when he needed. I stayed in the garage. I felt a naive joy obeying his orders and avoiding his prohibitions, until it was time for him to sell me. His bet was my highly feeling of dignity and self-estimating!

Afternoon sun was getting increasingly sweet as its glowing was disappearing; it became a peaceful disk of light.

"Violets" resumed building figures of wet sand with a faint smile.

- Do you remember? We built houses of sand when we were small children. Everything I built would collapse after a while, I didn't know why. However what you built would remain safe until someone crushed it. Do you think that it was a foretelling of our future? At the end, whenever I built a family life it collapsed, but as for you, you

have made one strong steadfast family life. Your elder son is in the secondary school now, while I'm still trying to have an opportunity to have a baby. I couldn't feel stability with any of them the way that might give stability for a child's life.

- No, No, my dear; there is nothing to do with our childhood' games ; all the matter is that you were more ambitious than me; I built small low modest houses while you always tried to build beautiful palaces and castles; as you know high sand building can't hold much, that is all.

- Even this, it symbolizes something; you were more realistic than me Noor smiled:

- But less skilled. Actually I was impressed by your ambition and liked your buildings. Believe me "Violets", you built nice things, though I would argue at that time that my houses were the most beautiful. Really I liked what you were doing; I was looking at their details behind your back.

"Violets" tried to force herself to smile:

- That was definitely before waves destroyed them.

A gentle wind danced with Violets' clothes and played with her hair tufts and forced them out of her veil, while she was casting away towards the horizon:

- All my palaces are still collapsing one after the other!

- "Violets", please, why are you so gloomy? Are you so sorry to lose him? I haven't seen you like that before, what is the matter?

"Violets" resorted to staring at the horizon again. The sun bowed leaving while drawing its orange curtains saying good bye to the day; the applause of the far coming waves accompany the scene.

- There is something I didn't tell anybody about.

Noor was listening attentively; she was worried.

- There was a penalty clause in the marriage contract.

- What? I haven't heard of such thing before. What was it?

- I was fascinated by him and thought he was really in love with me. So when he said he was afraid I would not take our marriage seriously and would give it up easily and he needed to put a penalty clause in our marriage contract, I accepted without hesitation just to take out his fears.

Noor gasped; she couldn't help covering her face with her hands because she was shocked.

“Violets “resumed:

- I felt that it was his right to take out his fears and make him feel ease towards me, because I had got married twice before him , from the other hand I didn't realize what was the actual trouble I had put myself in; I probably thought it was a kind of joke. Anyway, the penalty clause said that if I asked for divorce he would get my horse's ranch.

Noor said crying: How could you do that to yourself?

- Why didn't you discuss it with me, or with your father (God bless his soul), or your brother?

- At the end I would do what he wanted me to do, believe me. I was crazy about him, don't you imagine Noor? I really thought that it was a kind of a joke, as I told you, because he told me, or rather deluded me, that he felt jealous of the horses ,they kept me busy all my time. I understood that as it seemed somehow logic then. Now I realize

that he insisted to have it none other than money, particularly for a specific purpose; he wanted to leave me ruined.

Noor sighed; Violets choked with tears:

- If only my father didn't give me the horses before marriage! My feeling that I am not trustworthy bleeds my heart; it is so painful. He loved them and wanted to keep it forever, so he granted my brother his company, while he granted me the ranch because he knew I love it. He trusted me to take care of it. If only he gave it to my brother. I feel I have committed an unforgivable folly. If my father were here now I would not dear look in his eyes. Nothing would save me now. I thought that he would not be so grubby to rend them from me if we go so far as we went, but now he proves he would not lay them down if I divorce him. He insists not to leave any of them to me although he heats horses. So either I meekly accept him with all his scandals and dirty methods or I'll lose everything.

Sure I'll take him off like a dirty dress, not in the laundry basket, but where no return for him. I can't live without my horses but also can't live without dignity so I apologies to the horses.

- Who would apologies for the horses? Is this the end?

Noor gazed at her friend's face. She remembered her when she had entered the class with the teacher as a new student. She was of wide beautiful eyes, brown wavy hair hung down merrily on her shoulders and a curl scattered on her forehead. All girls kept away from her. She scared them of being so smart, so beautiful, and self-confident like all coddled. But when Noor tried to come close to her one day, she found a good merry girl of a loving heart; they didn't realized that then.

Do men feel this kind of jealousy of their wives? Are they intimidated by the wives' power, even if it is dedicated to their husbands? Otherwise, what prompts a man to seek the destruction of his wife?

Noor felt helpless, she only tried to save what could be saved of the joyful spirit of Violets, by offering a piece of advice.

But Violets ignored her advice and her attempts to tempt her to go to the ranch to see her horses and practice her favorite sport, with the hope that she might escape her gloomy mood. She even stuck her “hooves” into the spot, like a balky mare, claiming that she lost interest in everything, that she hated everything and wanted nothing but to get rid of this man at any cost.

Although days seemed as if they wouldn’t pass when one undergoes hard times, but they actually passed! Thus, Violets, woke up one morning and got ready to go to the court with her half-brother to undergo the peak of her tragedy. It never occurred to her that assigning her most precious property to someone towards whom she felt nothing but bitterness, and being deprived of the authority to dispose of any of the assets in her ranch, would be so hard for her.

She wanted to shout at the judge and accuse him of insanity, how dare he extort from her the ranch that’d witnessed her first baby steps, and granted it to a man who hated it and couldn’t be entrusted with a grain of sand in it?

But she managed to pull herself together and contented herself with glancing sideways at him with one eye. Like an angry mare, she sat silently beside her brother whom she meets only at times of emergency. There were certain moments, when she felt she was about to faint, but she remained firm till she got home.

Fahd was the star in the terror of the day. On that gloomy day she recalled that he’d once expressed his approval of the idea that owners of aging horses, in other countries, might sell their meat to factories of cat food. But as far as she knew, there were no such factories in this beautiful gulf. Nevertheless, he might do anything with Mabruka,

the great grandmother of most her horses. The crook-backed Mabruka was good for nothing now; he, with his mercantile mentality, would consider it an unbearable burden, and who knows what he might do with it. As for the young Raheeb, she was sure that he'd sell it with "Violets" junior to lovers of horse race, together with everything that might be sold with a good price. How unfair!

How could he insult her and push her to file a divorce, then steal her most precious property? What diabolic mind has stipulated the penalty clause in marriage contracts? Besides, what have the disputes between people to do with horses? Have horses committed anything wrong?

There's always neighing coming from a ranch. It came from a remote legendary place. There had always been phantoms of wild horses running since eternity. The story began since ancient times, would you say that the two horses looked out of the Ark and saw the great flood approaching with mountain-high waves to engulf the world?

No one knows. When the flood receded, the two horses had to run very far and settled in the wilderness, far from Man, and lived there for a long period of time till the two grew into herds running jovially here and there, with no bridles, no reins... and no limits.

For ages horses enjoyed living wild ... For ages they ran wherever they wished, their herds spread everywhere adorning the wilderness with their splendid well-proportioned shapes, with their hair glittering in the sunshine and flowing on their necks like cascades, with their wide eyes, their graceful strides in clear water and their captivating dignity, until Man tamed them ... Thereupon, chivalry was born.

Only the coward hates horses ... And the coward for "Violets" is the person who, as she has found out today, has neither a place in the journey of horses through time, nor a place on the list of horses' lovers.

In the cup of coffee she was trying to drink, she envisaged what havoc

Fahd would inflict on her ranch. Inside each ice cubic she pulled out from the mold to put in her juice, she saw Fahd's face laughing with delight and malicious rejoice, the moment the ice cubic hit the juice surface, he 'd start celebrating his victory over her with one of his mistresses.

She left everything and threw herself on the bed, she closed her eyes and imagined him entering the ranch with his real estate agents to sell it bit by bit. She went on envisaging such tragic sensations until she felt she was on the brink of collapsing. She dismissed all thoughts and tried to sleep but in vain. When she gave up, she saw Noor in front of her.

- I advise you to again and again to go to your ranch and enjoy your time there to please yourself a little. He would not approach the ranch before three month as they said in the court.

- No Noor. I can't do that. I'll never enjoy going there knowing that it'll be taken away from me. Besides, I should try to adapt to live without it since all attempts to appeal the verdict will be in vain. I haven't got the energy to start a new ranch even after twenty years ... Therefore, I'll go to the ranch a few days before handing it over to bid farewell to it, to the horses, to Komar and to the rest of the workers there ... And ... You will come with me, won't you?

Noor felt that it was another gloomy day of "Violets' ". Would this nightmare end soon?

- Do you believe that Rashed has warned me many times against Fahd when I start dealing with him to do maintenance works at the ranch? You know of course that Rashed is an engineer, I was impressed with his personality when I found out that he was also interested in horses and that he had a ranch and some horses, I felt that he was Mr. Right, therefore, I responded to his attention and his great attraction to me, and I accepted his marriage proposal.

But, when Fahd came to work at the ranch, everything changed ... Rashed was furious when he noticed my interest in the new man and said that he suspected his motives for courting me. He also said that there was a rivalry between the two of them that's been going on for a very long time, thanks to which he's found out what kind of men Fahd was ... But, I believed nothing of what he said. I was infatuated with Fahd until the day came when Rashed asked me to choose between being his fiancée or carrying on dealing with Fahd. I chose dealing with Fahd pretending that my choice was prompted by the anger I felt because of Rashed's attitude, but the truth was that I had become fond of Fahd. After that, I fell in love with him deeply ... So deeply that I agreed to the penalty clause.

She closed her eyes and degenerated her head.

- I will never forget the frustrated tone of Rashid's voice blaming me for letting him go. He really loved me. Haven't you seen my wedding party theme? It was his idea. Now I feel surprised when I remember how he took attentive care of every detail with love.

Don't look at me this way! I allowed myself to use his idea to my wedding, because he would not use it in his own wedding party if I wasn't the pride. Originally, I inspired him, It carried my features; I am the only Cavalier and the only woman of the name "Violets" known to him as he used to say. So when he held his wedding party after a time it was an ordinary one..., haven't you known?

Yes, he got married, didn't you know? I haven't known why he divorced after less than a year, as I heard. He might just want to forget me but there has been no compatibility between them.

Now I see a question in your eyes, why should I leave him while I knew how much he loves me?

You know I was fascinated by him when I first saw him. He was so smart to the extent that I was unable to think, I always dreamed of a smart husband. Although I felt Rashid might be a fantastic husband because he liked the same things that I love, and I had him a lot of affection, but wasn't as smart as Fahd.

I wanted to marry a man whom I had true love to. You know how I was keen not to have another divorce. It was a very hard experience. But I confess that our passion always interfere to justify our preferences.

Now I haven't regretted leaving Rashid, Do you remember his present? If He hadn't been so grubby at my wedding night I would have felt so sorry about him! No use of self-flagellation now. Time will never get back, never; the best thing to do is to try to forget and go on. I wonder what life would be. Was it the one that was split in the court yesterday and it lost its best half?

I was wandering when I heard the judge deciding transferring the ownership of the horses ranch with its horses to Fahd. Was it the same feeling when a limb is amputated? Ok, I will skip that? Perhaps,

Violets swallowed Aspirin:

- Did you try once tripping and falling?

Noor closed her eyes and review her memories:

- Maybe! Yes, I think!

Do you remember the moment when you have a sense of imbalance and about to hit the ground? Do you feel that strange moment? You feel scared and embarrassment for a second. You will make your best to avoid falling down. Then you realize that you can't control it; you completely fail to keep you balance and your falling down is vital. When you are completely helpless and unable to save yourself; you

feel that everything is letting you down; your world is collapsing; all things join forces to succeed to destroy you ;you feel you have unwillingly surrendered and waiting for the crash. All that in one second! What a strange second! Have you experienced such a thing before? For me this has been for months.

It was two o'clock after midnight, Violets rose up at her bed, removed the quilt back. She was trying to catch her breath. Why did she remember her mother's death now? How could that memory spring? She was attacked by the image her grandmother standing in the kitchen next to the door fifteen years ago, trying in vain to control her tears. Then she calmed down a little and began wandering in the luxurious house of her daughter trying to trace her tracks. Then went with her granddaughter to the ranch and see the horses, and then extends her sight watching the vast cross-sectional area and turned to Violets saying:

Do I tell you something? I was so uneasy when your father came to ask to marry your mother, your mother might have told you about it. I preferred she got married to a Kuwaiti young man because I don't want her to be away of me, but I agreed at the request of your mother but I felt later that she was more happy here. When she called me she was always happy; she was laughing merrily when she told me how you father trained her to ride horses till she loved this kind of sport. When she gave birth to you they, your father and mother, were keen to train you to ride horses at early age, till you have become a cavalier. Then she gave up this sport. It was enough for her to feel proud watching you competing with your father and overran him, and watching you always overrunning your beers.

This morning, when I was crying in the kitchen I wished she had got married in Kuwait and never was away all these years, as if she had stayed it would have protected her of that fatal disease which killed her.

I don't know why I remember this old wish, or why it urges all the time. But this wish has vanished when I entered the ranch. I remembered how much she loved it. My daughter had spent the best part of her life her. Now I think that if time returned back and I'm given the chance to choose a husband for her, I would choose your father.

“Violets” burst into tears again. Then she suddenly stood and went to call her brother; there should be an appeal. She would struggle hard; she would get help of the most powerful advocates. She would not surrender to that man and would not hand an easy prey over to him.

Appeal was held, but some things couldn't be proven easily; even if it was proven they couldn't be taken as a base for a court judgment. So days passed and the judgment would stay like a fate; it became an actual reality; “violets “had nothing to do but to try to live with.

She proved she can act even in the difficult times. Time to surrender the ranch was about to come. Before this date Violets went with Noor to the ranch, not to ride horses for the last time but to say farewell to everything and everybody there.

Seeing the ranch again after this long absence refreshed her a little bit, so she forgot the bitter feeling of losing it. She entered smiling taking her sunglasses off to try to keep the real image of what was her ranch.

She stood in front of little Violet and petted it into its glossy black hair falling over its long neck. Rashid named this mare; it was born when we were still together. And the name of that beautiful was Alia. I and Jolie had witnessed its birth a year and a half before; we had a long vigil for that.

She was silent; her eyes stared away when she remembered the other ugly face of Fahd. He showed revulsion against the ranch so he arbitrarily ordered to reduce the times of visiting it to once a month.

She sighed. She felt strange about herself; how could she obey that order? However she smiled before Noor could notice anything then kissed the mare and wiped her mother's face then she went to Ahlam.

- Ahlam is the kindest mare I have. It is hired a lot to let kids ride it in events. I always choose it for this job because it is calm and patient. I always send it with Hameed; he trained it since being a small one. Do you believe it? If I heard that an angel came down to Earth and turned into a mare, I would think it is Ahlam! Do you like to have a ride on it?

- No of course!

- Why? Don't you like riding horses in your childhood?

- No! I mean I never tried to.

- So you miss a lot. Although riding a horse with a horseman is not like running free on a horse back, it is completely different. It is a wide beautiful space. Oh God, I love it, I love running while trusting an animal which has the power to kill you, trusting your good skill and the beautiful relationship between you and these wonderful creatures.

Noor smiled apologizing:

- I still prefer to run by car.

- The car can't love you, or recognize you like horses do, even if you choose what suites you. Believe me, nothing more romantic than a tranquil picnic on a horse back in a cool Fall day like this one.

She looked at her friend smiling:

- It seemed to me I have succeeded to tempt you. Do you want to try now? Ahlam and Hameed are here if you don't trust me.

- I'll try if you try.

Violets laughed.

- Stop your cunning way! I told you, everything between the horses and me has finished; I'm here just to say farewell to them!

Violets' shadow of smile trended to Mabrookah the grand grandmother of the ranch horses. She found it parked near the fence and flies landed on its face and wet eyes. She sat by it and shaking her hands to keep flies away and rapped its dark velvet shoulder.

- We have to respect old aged even if it is an old horse. I wish you knew how much I appreciate this mare, she is the grandmother of nearly all horses her. Do you believe that I feel it is my own grandmother too?

Noor burst out of laughing.

- I understand now where you get your light-heartedness!

Noor was giggling loosely while walking behind her friend tottering. Violets passed by these horses one by one. She kissed that and petted this till she approached Raheeb. She stood in front of it and held its face with both hands. Noor was pleased to see Violets smiling to the horse. She liked this feature of Violet's character that she deals with animals and things in a very unique way.

- By the way, horses are similar to humans in many respects, as well as all the animals I think. However, I feel this particular horse has lot of human characteristics. It is often proud of itself. A noble, magnanimous. Do you believe it?

Noor got a fit of hysterical laughter again.

- It's really so. Magnanimity is not a quality of people alone. I wish I could give you an example. There are some things to be felt only and not to be recognized. It is so clever, sweet and vital, but it is very stubborn, and very violent when angry. You would not dare even to try to stand in front of it looking at his eyes when it is angry. I have seen him so with some others but never with me.

Noor was coughing and wiping the tears of laughter, Violets continued:

- I think if it were a human, he would be Rashid.

Noor smiled when she was wiping its shiny golden hair. Komar was far but he came to put an end to the pleasant moment. He was carrying a box to his mistress. The two ladies gasped when seeing the old box rapped with a gift lace. He handed it to Violets.

- Violets, I advise you, do not open it. Give it to me. Believe me; you do not need to read the lyrics. What you went through in the recent months is far enough..

Noor made a sudden snatch at the box but violets restored it.

- Noor! What is worse than what I am actually in? Do you think that there are worse words than he sent two years ago? Let him gloat over my misfortune! I know he might be angrier than two years ago. He must be very angry. He would not forgive me.

- Why wouldn't you be merciful at yourself? Why should you read it?

- You have said it. I am curious. I would not feel comfortable until I know what he has sent now. But....

Violets:

You will find your ownership contract with this letter. I restored it to you. I used a broker to buy it in an oblique way in order not to make this mean person to clutch it. Then I have granted it to you. Don't be afraid, I don't want money or any other kind of compensation. For me, I can compensate what I paid within two or three years from now.

I know that you are as stubborn as your horse Raheeb ,and you might insist not to take it as a present, so it is ok to pay for me in monthly installments,the amount you are able to pay (because I know you are broken) if you prefer to fling the money I paid in my face. However it is yours.

By the way, when I entered the ranch yesterday I saw violet color shadows in the sky, I saw you in them. I smelled the scent of wild flowers which always reminds me of you.

Do you remember that there was a music track which reminds me of you? It is called “Vision”. It is of oriental features which suggests something divine and melancholic; it has some of the ambiguity of night, and the ambiguity of time when it turns into a happy or a sad memory. I do not know why you always remind me of this music. I feel that you yourself are that piece of music. Yesterday I imagined that I am listening to it in your ranch; I saw in your horses’ eyes the same shining of yours.

I saw that the ranch represents all what I love, however I don’t want it and, in a way or another, it would not want me.

A note: Do not think, even for a second, that I did it for the sake of the beauty of your eyes (though they are really so), or in order to get you back, although I still hope so... (I think). Do not feel grateful at all because I did not do that for you, I did for myself. That man wanted to humiliate the woman whom I loved and I wanted not to give him this opportunity. That’s all about it.

Go back to your horses. They are sad; they miss you. You know that the feeling of missing might cause sickness for horses... (May be it might do the same for other than horses too).

If I am allowed to write another note I would like to say that I send you this letter with the necklace in an old box this time too, just for kidding, because my grandmother keeps all her necklaces, her important papers and our old photos in an old biscuits box like this, so you can begin from her.

Best wishes

Rashid

Noor was reading the letter with Violet, and when they finished it she was laughing and feeling amazed. The flush on her cheeks reflected Violet's feeling of great joy but she suppressed it. Her hands were trembling while reading the contract, then she shook her head denying it: No!

Noor's crying was like the horses neighing:

- Never. Don't even think of refusing this gift!
- But you know, more than anyone else in the world, that I refuse anyone to feel pity for me.
- Do think that I am stupid or you pretend to think so? Have you ever heard about anyone who gave a ranch worth millions for another person because he felt pity about him? If you do, give him my address to feel pity for me please.
- I can't let him enslave me Noor.
- He won't. It is in your hand not to. If he wanted to do so he would not sign all these papers before sending them to you Look! The whole ranch is yours now the moment you accept it, don't you understand?
- Then I'll fling every penny he paid for it at his face.
- He would not mind it. Look at the letter, at the seventh at eighth line of it.

Violet laughed when she looked at it:

- At least I should talk to him and rebuke him for interfering in my life.
- You have to talk to him to thank him. Not necessary now. But when your impetuosity allows it.

Violet's smile was so beautiful.

- You know Noor if there was no use to accept it but to foil Fahd's trail to destroy me, it would be enough.

- Oh, you see.

Violet smiled to Raheeb and then she moved to a corner to rethink and reread the contract and the letter time after time. Noor went quietly out of the scene to walk in the ranch to give her friend a space she needed.

Violet couldn't help smiling. She discovered the feeling of relaxation which was brought by happy news coming after hard times. Fahd lost the ranch's ownership; nothing would make her happier than this; If it remained of Rashid's she would be so happy and comfortable because she knew he was a real chevalier, so he would appreciate the ranch and all the horses and mares in it. It was not the time to think what to do with these papers, but is it the time of being amazed? She was really amazed of her feeling tranquility when she knew that the ranch went to Rashid. She didn't know before how much she would trust this man.... This feeling of being completely safe is a warm and calming feeling, mixed with a little agitation.

Noor breathed in the gentle air that saturated with horses pens smell; she smiled as she recalled a message from Rashid saying that he smelled wild flowers. Where did it come from? She wondered. She walked away of the stables; the smell of the stables disappeared but there was no smell of wild flowers. Did he mean those plants that horses seemed to feed on in the fields? She approached watching the workers cutting and spreading them on the ground to dry, but the fresh grass didn't smell wild flowers at all.

She lifted her head looking at the sky in all directions. There were shades of blue and some white and dark silver clouds, but no trace of "violet shades" as he said. She felt joyful as that fool man loved her madly... and that fool lady (herself) was still intransigent.

When Noor returned, she saw her blowing parked shaking off the straw on her clothes, and then rebreathe the air deeply as if she was preparing herself for doing something new.

- Where to? Your look suggests that you made a decision. A positive one? Are you going to accept the ranch?

- I haven't thought of what to do in this regard. Such decisions should not be taken overnight.

Violets took her phone out of the bag. She was smiling, so Noor wondered curiously and optimistically:

- Are you going to talk to him to thank him?

- No of course. Didn't you say, "When your impetuosity allows you so"?

- Who would you talk to you then?

- Kumar. I want him to saddle Raheeb. It hasn't ridden him for a long ago.

When Violets mounted her horse she seemed to be in her appropriate place which she can find herself in, she smiled.

- It will take me less than half an hour to go to the end of the ranch and return on Raheeb, look at your watch.

Noor didn't look at her watch, but she laughed when she saw Violets on the horse back running quickly making a cloud of dust behind.

Was it the color of the dust mixed with the color of sky and clouds, or the color of a joy after a long absence? Or what fills the air now with shades of violet?

My Namesake

Noura Al Saad

The sharp slap fell heavily on my classmate's face. It felt like a guillotine skidding with a heavy blade into my chest bones and with that the whole class fell into a spell of silence, not one sound of a breath. My mate's cheek looked as red as a beetroot. Her eyes watered, her little nose shook but couldn't cry because of her sudden great panic. The teacher kept on waving the writing book in front of her lowered sad eyes and it was then when I could spot the stain on it, it was the same hand print I ensued yesterday on the brown writing book after I used my sister's ink cartridge. This book, no doubt, is mine! It was I who should have got that echoing slap.

The teacher continued shouting and howling with rage at my classmate Fatima:

- Is this an answer? After all the explanation of yesterday lesson?
Smart girl! Is this a writing book or a piece of dirt?

Then she threw the book right at her face. Fatima took the book in her hands and realized it was not hers. Then, muttered under her shaky voice: Miss... It is not mine.

Again and loudly, the teacher exclaimed:

What? Oh poor creature, for God's sake! Here is your name! It is you Fatima Mohamed, isn't it?

- No... I am Fatima Ali

- And who is Fatima Mohamed then?

The shouting voices of the class mates got mixed up and more than 20 hands pointed their fingers as if surrounding me with sharp spears.

As soon as the teacher laid her hand on Fatima's shoulder and regrettably said: My lovely child, tears flowed heavy and nonstop from her eyes.

The teacher focused on consoling the other Fatima and trying her best to comfort her. The whole class shared her regret and gathered around Fatima, even the school's representative and the secretary.

After a while, it seemed they had forgotten me and I survived the punishment, even Fatima herself was not to blame me later! She shouldn't have done that since she won, because of me, all the attention and the teacher pampered her all that week.

The other Fatima knew well that I didn't have a hand in carrying the same name, and that making a mistake in math homework or making my writing book dirty was not on purpose. It was not my fault to be what I was. That was clearly understood to any logical mind. Perhaps, that was something children were able to understand more than adults. However we, the other Fatimah and me, surpassed it and became good friends.

Fatima was smart and well organized. Her handwriting was better than mine. She would excellently draw a butterfly, a fish and a flower. Her packed lunch looked more delicious than that of the school's canteen (you could see it in the way she ate it). Her hair was sleeker than mine and carefully split with a neat line.

Mine was not as straight and free. Unlike her, I didn't pay attention to tidying my school bag and my uniform was always creased up. None of my family cared to stitch the tear on the side of my uniform or most probably didn't notice it. Moreover, my mum didn't give me a packed lunch. At home, we could only have what was available for us

on the breakfast table: bit of bread, cheese and oil. The other Fatima was prettier than me too; a fact I realized only later on. My namesake was successful in her grades. She was the second top in the class but I was the sixth at my best. Her parents backed her up and always pushed her to be best of the best, but my parents were satisfied to let the neighbors know that I will pass my class this year. Like some of their kids, I didn't study after school hours. I always passed my tests through my careful listening to my preferred subjects' teachers... I only listened to those whom I liked. Love was the center gravity of every single thing in my life. Either I love something and cling onto it or dislike and consequently ignore it. I loved Fatima because she got the best of what we both had.

While I was walking with Fatima on the way home, I asked her to stop near a tree with branches suspended out from one of the street's houses. We were attracted by a heavy branch studded with deliciously seducing big ripe green almonds but we tirelessly could not reach it. I threw my school bag at the branch but it flew back down quickly. I asked Fatima to mesh her hands together to help in lifting me up to get the almonds. She suspiciously looked around and hesitantly obeyed. I jumped for few seconds towards the branch with my legs swinging in the air and consequently unable to look down whilst Fatima begging me to be careful and to avoid making any noise. But although I couldn't look down I felt like a sack of potato messed up in dust.

A tall boy passed and stopped by our side watching what we were doing then slowly walked away. He didn't leave but leaned over an old wall opposite to the tree where he watched and waited patiently.

I knew who the lad was, his mum, dad and Uncles. His name was Ibrahim and he was the son of our neighbor in the neighborhood where

we lived. He knew my parents too and if he had witnessed my fall and snitched me to my mum or my brother, I would be in a serious trouble. For a girl in my home, I have always been punished and warned how falling hurts girls particularly and may lead to unanticipated horrid consequences...Now what would wait for me?

Ibrahim was tall, slim and physically fit with cupped eyes and a dimple under his goatee. His fingers were slim with rose colored knuckles and his husky and soft voice penetrates the heart like a sliding knife. His overall presence mesmerized the girls and touched them with a funny kind of happiness. To us he was a grace and our only hope was to get him closer.

Although I usually felt panic when certain things happened due to my irresponsible behavior and to the dire consequences that might follow, however I now found myself welcoming the presence of Ibrahim amongst us... I consulted Fatima and with eyes full of bright she agreed instantly and we both covered our giggles under our sleeves. We beckoned him to come over. He reluctantly moved towards us. Like Fatima and me, he was shy. Oh dear... how silly boys are!

We looked at him in silence, he didn't let us down. He jumped high. He had a bit too much enthusiasm; he bumped his head against the branch. He pretended that he intended to do the movement and didn't care about the bump. He jumped again lightly, this time towards the branch and used his weight to pull it down. The branch broke and landed on top of the three of us. No harm done! We didn't ask Ibrahim if he was hurt, instead we collected as much as we could from the almonds scattered around us, then ran without looking back and so did Ibrahim because we realized quite well that the banging noise made by the

sounding breakage and fall of the branch would attract other people attention to inquire.

Having run fast, we reached a junction where Fatima and I would split up each to the side leading to her home. Fatima's house was on the verge of the neighborhood and mine was in the heart of it. Suddenly, we were struck by the fact that I left my school bag behind but she didn't. We both had a mouthful of almonds. I couldn't dare go back there but went straight home via a short cut through the deserted cemetery questioning myself: how would my mum react? And more importantly, how may I go to school tomorrow without my bag?

What a bad luck!

I couldn't describe how happy I was to spot my own bag in flesh and bones resting on the outside wall of our home by the main gate. I looked well but found no one around. I learnt then that it was Ibrahim who brought it back and left it there.

Life always puts me through depressing experiences but the worst was right in front of me. Few red stains had dirtied the front and the sides of my uniform. My heart jumped out of my chest. How can I justify these bloody stains on my dusty clothing? My only alibi of almonds is hidden deep in my stomach now. I imagined my mum's face bursting out with fear; she will push me and scream loud into my face not to tell a lie because lying is haram (a sin). Her deep sad voice will blame me; if I had loved her enough I would have taken care of myself! I would at least not angered or hurt her, she struggled and suffered more than enough and to the utmost extent and I really loved my mum. I loved her much more than anything you might think of; more than the love of ten kids honoring thy most devoted old parent. For the cause of love,

recognition and acceptance, we obey the orders of our mothers and adjust to the circumstances they force upon us.

Falling in such a trap is very easy. Meaning that we could gradually and willingly transform ourselves to what they want us to become later; they divert and drive us into it. Therefore, I hereby, suggest that we have to struggle against the love of our mums and our love to them. Nevertheless, I couldn't stop myself from loving my mum secretly and I deeply decided to allow my children not to love me very much (if I will ever have any). Because, regardless of what mothers want, love will lawfully open the door to the bad thoughts and kill the heart, as well as stop our growth and deprive us of what we wish to become later on in life.

I was then full of regret that I ate the almonds and disobeyed my mother. So I decided to fake an illness and pretend a tummy ache and tell a simple tale. Lying isn't always bad and shameful. Filling my lughole with lies was rather better than the shame and the scar that would hit me. Also, it would protect me from all the anger and the tension which will disturb the tranquility of my mother's miserable life.

In the following days to come, Ibrahim was our hero: he waited for us at the same time and the same place holding a big slingshot in his hand and due to his excellence, we filled our stomach and pockets with almonds. We never thanked Ibrahim and we didn't start any conversation with him. As for him, he didn't accompany us on the way back home but he observed us both with a smile that filled our eyes with a light brighter than that of the sun.

On the fourth day, Fatima and I split up at the gate; she said she was going to her auntie's house at the other end of road, where she would

meet up with her parents for a circumcision party. She left hastily. When I passed by the almond tree I didn't see Ibrahim, I felt how heavy my bag was; how empty my world was; how the bitterness in my throat was about to strangle me and how the pain tightly squeezed my intestines.

Fatima showed me the letters that Ibrahim used to leave under some stone off the road and that he had sent her a photo of him. I helped in writing her letters back to him and I was more creative than her. It was very easy for me to dictate her and she scripted with her hands all what I wanted to say to Ibrahim. I embroidered the wording in a way neither Fatima nor Ibrahim could understand what it truly meant to me. We shared his letters; we read them together again and again; we learnt them by heart though they clearly were disjointed sentences dipped in hypocrisy which reminded us of what we heard in Arabic movies.

After Ibrahim dumped Fatima, he evaded her and went on using his slingshot somewhere else, she sought my help. I held her hand and cried together because I knew well the meaning of rejection and loss.

When my mum pushed my sisters to look out for a bride for my brother, they suggested so many names, mainly their good friends. Only when I shouted the name of Fatima; my name bearer; with whom I almost shared everything, my mother rebuked me by saying: which Fatima? My sisters stared at me with pity, but my auntie pushed me by my chest and fired shells from her mouth. She mentioned plenty of words which consisted of (them) and (us) and (they are not like us) and (they don't have our standards). My mother shut me up and made me leave the room. Nothing was worthy of discussion here. It was a finished and sealed off matter.

I threw and curled myself under my quilt feeling uptight and my eyes were tearful. I felt the hands of my mother checking on my head, I pretended I was asleep so she continued on playing with my hair. The sudden drifting of imagination and sleepy feel helped and drove me to think: What if I was born there at the other end of the road? That night I dreamt that I was sleeping in Fatima's bed and she was sleeping in mine next to my mother and sisters.

With My Father

Shamma Al Kuwari

It was after he had cancer, days before the accident.

Love and Parting are friends. We love but we may depart whom we love, although love always remains in our hearts. It is our destiny.

Those who have departed life can never be brought back again, but still they may not be consigned to forgetfulness. Everyone glorifies the names of his/her beloved, and I yearn to my love. I have a burning desire to kiss his hands and feet and to hold his face close to my keen chest.

Sometimes I feel stupor of missing him; I couldn't help thinking of him all the time. He is my love, dad.

The worst kind of parting is that when losing the ones we've spend our whole life with, not merely years or decades.

The hardest time is when you lay farewell to someone you have lived with for a long period. I used to hear his tender voice telling his pleasant stories, while I was sitting listening in his lab. I watched the way aging was changing his facial expressions; and how wrinkles invaded his lovely face to become more glowing. Ageing whitened his thick silky hair, but cruel disease took all of it so he always put a rounded white lacy cap.

Really, how difficult it is to part people we love. This causes great pain to both, body and memory, till we fell so exhausted.

He was all I had, just as I was all he had. My dear father met my mother while he was studying in Britain in 1968. She was Lebanese. Their love was quick and short-lived as it lasted for ten years only and I was the only outcome of it.

I adored their black and white photo together on the banks of the Thames, my father dressed in his elegant suit while my mother was in her short loose white dress with small black dots and her voluminous hairdo which made that photo so unique. I have always caught my dad scrutinizing that photo then hiding it in an old notebook he kept since he was studying at Oxford in Britain as he once told me.

He kept it because it holds memories dear to his heart. He met my mother because of that notebook. At that time, she missed a number of classes while the exam was approaching. None offered her help except my father, and here was the spark of love that led to their marriage. I knew he adored her. On many occasions, while he was following the news of the civil war in Lebanon and the Israeli aggression on the south, he urged me to call her in a confused tone of voice by saying:

- Mona, call your mother. Let's check on her.

She loved him too but I didn't dare to say she adored him, for my mother didn't excel in the art of adoring. However, she was skillful in love and loyalty. She knew she couldn't adapt to our local life, so she decided to leave and sacrifice my custody in return of her freedom. My father was sad and broken. He had always fulfilled her demands; they finished their education at university and they had me while they were still there in Britain. He consented on her wish to have an only child so that she could attend to her study.

Due to the fact that she couldn't adapt to the humid and oppressive heat of the climate in our country, they used to spend the summer holiday in the fascinating mountains of Lebanon where I spent my childhood and early youth. After that, they together pursued their higher education. Then, after ten years of studying in Britain my father confronted her saying firmly:

“I have to go back to my home country. I have no life here. My country makes my life and my life is there.”

They broke up peacefully but they kept feeling respect and cordiality towards one another. I'd never heard him talking badly about her as I had never heard her talking inappropriately about him. I am so lucky to have them and to have their both love. He had never given up me, and she never neglected or forgot me. I was ten when she bid me farewell amidst the crowds at Heathrow Airport congested with arrivals and departures. She hugged me then pushed me away assuring me firmly:

- He is a great man. You are lucky to have him a father.

I hugged her hysterically asking her not to leave me, but once again, she moved away saying in that same assuring tone:

- If I weren't sure that you'll be fine, I would have never gave up your custody to him. She caressed my chestnut- colored hair, stared into my hazel eyes that I inherited from her and said:

- You'll be fine. You will be better living there with him. Trust my words.

My childish mind refused to believe her. I yelled and wept as she disappeared among the crowd. She didn't come back to calm me down while my father hugged me with affection, caressed my hair and said:

- You are everything to me, my dear child.

On the flight from Heathrow to Doha Airport in 1979, I saw a lot of tears in his eyes. I did not ask him about it, I thought that those raining tears were inevitable, as being a part of the event, escort for the trip, since I had spent the entire trip crying too.

By time, I no longer thought that the tears he shed were normal, whenever he looked at that photo and whenever he held that old

notebook in the hall of the house that embraced the two of us. He used to contemplate the photos retrieving memories dear to his heart, and then became preoccupied with his thoughts until noticing my inquisitive looks, so he said trying to make his tone neutral:

- The dust in the air has affected my eyes.

I knew that there was no dust in our house which lies quietly in the center of Khalifa city near Omar bin al-Khattab mosque, but I had chosen to remain silent, and not to interfere.

My father had a positive sensitive inner ear for music and a beautiful sweet voice. He loved the songs of Umm Kulthum and Fairouz but the songs which he listened to more were Inta Omri (you are my life) and biktub Ismak ya habibi (I write your name my love). However, the song he used to recite while looking at his old papers was “farewell to our last night together.... farewell to the dearest person ... May God grant us with patience.... without you I am like a lost lifetime.” as if he didn’t bid his love farewell.

When I was two months ahead of my fourteenth birthday, my father addressed me in a semi-neutral tone saying:

- You’re a grown up lady, Mona, and now you can be entrusted with dear possessions.

I nodded in agreement but without having understood what he meant. He resumed by saying:

- Your mother got married two weeks ago, so I can no longer keep her photos or any of my old memories with her.

An affectionate smile appeared on his mouth while he was gazing into the color of my eyes, and continued saying:

- Everything has moved to you now.

He then resumed trying to make his tone humorous in order to soothe the atmosphere:

- All property rights are preserved to you; our past, present and future while both of us are done, we have nothing but the past...only the past.

My grandmother insisted on him to marry again. When I was a child, I was scared to death of merely thinking about that proposition and how it might come true. No logical reason could justify my fear except the images presented in films and series about the devilish, cruel step-mother. Afterwards, I realized that my grandmother's proposition was truly reasonable and thus I supported her and encouraged this idea more than he could imagine until he consented and got married to a divorced woman who was a mother of three children; two boys and a girl. What happened between them afterwards was beyond expectations.

Before signing the marriage contract, they agreed that she would give up the custody of children to their father since the law is clear and strict in regard to that issue as it affirms the drop of the mother's right to custody if she got married. Two days after their marriage, however, they had a heated discussion as she insisted that my father give up me and send me back to Lebanon to be under my mother's custody. My father tried to convince her using logic that it was impossible to send me back to Lebanon because I simply belong here, to my father's roots and origins. And above all, my mother gave up my custody when I was still a child even before she got married, thus how could he send me back to her after I being a young lady? The sounds of their quarrels reached our ears, my grandmother and I, while sitting in the ground floor. My father then entered the room while his loud voice echoed all over the place. He was agitated with anger and tension, that he repeated nervously:

- She is insane! I can't believe how I agreed to marry her.

Consequently, their marriage ended before it started, and my grandmother never repeated discussing that issue again.

Each day of our life together was a beautiful special day. My father and I were big fans of the graceful pen of the Egyptian writer "Abdulwahab Al Mutawa". I followed reading Friday mail of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram. He was creative in giving solutions to the terrible problems being addressed. A lot of stories had struck me, and a lot of solutions had impressed me more and more.

I loved to discuss what was written in that newspaper about Friday mail with my father. My grandmother, despite of her old age and illiteracy, shared our discussion, and laid good opinions.

I was impressed with the story of the red eyes which was written by Mutawa then in a series of story books which my dad had collected for me from the annual book fair. The red eyes, told the story of a young man who missed his dead father, missed family intimate sessions every Thursday night, he said: (laughs have been absent ... warm nights have been absent... dear father has been absent.)

Then I cried until my eyes became bloodshot.

That evening, after my dear father had returned from the university, he noted of course the redness of my eyes. I told him the reason when he asked me. He smiled calmly and said in a tone of sober while sitting opposite to me in the lounge; he looked away through the open window towards the Sidra tree in the other side of the house yard:

- So what is the positive side to this story?

I didn't recognize his purpose, I was still sopping and wiping my nose with the back of my hand, I repeated:

- There seems to be dust in the lounge.

He turned to me gazing at me but not for long and said quietly:

- No dust in the place; Doha sky is net this evening, go to tell your grandmother to be ready for a walk by the sea.

My father insisted to bush my grandmother wheelchair. I looked her and there, the moon was full that night, in the middle of the sky and Doha clear sea reflected its lights and a gentle wind caressed the faces tenderly.

A little kid running barefoot behind his brother who had stolen his bike; their mother was behind urging them to calm down and control their behaviors. A fat man passed by; his shirt stuck to his body because of much sweat; he carried a bottle of water in his right hand, he was drinking a little and pouring a lot on his face.

My father whispered to me pointing at the moon saying sarcastically: Do you see it?

I answered firmly: Are you mocking me? Of course I see it!

My father smiled tenderly. We sat together on a close chair and he parked the wheelchair of my grandmother beside him. She joined the conversation and said smartly:

- Oh you pedantic don't you understand what your father means?

I did not need to decode the mysteries of my father and my grandmother, It was enough to me what I had suffered throughout the day, my father asked me about the positive side of the story, then he asked me if I could see the moon on the full moon night, but my grandmother accused me of incomprehension.

Dad did not look at me. He just said while watching the mother reproving her older child because he did not share his younger brother playing:

- The immediate impact of that realistic tale is that it aroused your emotions; it provoked your tears to the extent that.....

He stopped a while, and looked at my reddened eyes and continued:

- ... To the extent that you hurt yourself. Do you think that this is the benefit of your reading a story?

He waited for me a while to answer him, but I naïvely didn't, I decided to focus on watching the moon; the answer might be written on its white face, but I didn't find an answer there.

My dear dad said:

- Didn't you read the rest of Abdulwahab Al Mutawa's answer for it?

He said to him and to all readers, (Do fill your eyes with the i

- Mage of people you love; tell them you love them; sit with them for hours and hours, give them the priority, and don't feel bored of telling them how much you love them.)

I gasped. I wanted to continue playing the symphony of crying, but my eyes dried; no tears were left.

My father and my grandmother were busy talking about my aunt and my uncles; as for me I kept watching the moon, to fill my eyes of its sight. I found a halo of fog surrounding it, but I realized that it was a mere reflection of what was in my mind.

"The one of red tears" was a hard serious lesson; it made me fill my eyes with the sight of my father's face till I keep his specific expressions by heart.

My dear grandmother died after five month of that lesson. It was the beginning of a long way of great fear and worry of being shocked by the loss of the beloved ones.

I Excluded the idea of marriage for years, especially after the death of my grandmother, I was afraid of the idea of parting Dad, I did not want to get to find myself in the house where he didn't share me breakfast and all the details of life.

I did not find the man who would approve living in my father's house, until I turned thirty. That person was a well-educated man. He has a large number of brothers and sisters, and the idea of staying in my father's house was best suited to him, he was working in the offshore oil fields, and was forced to stay there nearly two weeks, so he would feel more comfortable if I stayed with my dad.

I held my wedding ceremonies in a quiet and simple way, in a beautiful dreamy hall adorned with white flowers, romantic lighting and Fairuz quiet music. Then, I traveled with my husband to the peaceful countryside of Netherlands; away from the bustle of cities, and absurd exciting shopping.

My marriage was a wonderful juncture of my life where I lived its loveliness with my father. I had given birth to a child I named Mubarak, on the name of my father; as he named me on his mother's name more than thirty years ago. One child was not enough; I did not want my son to live alone. I was living with fear of the future surprises. I, one year later, gave birth to a wonderful baby girl, whom I named Dunia, on my mother's name who has never left my mind; she rather visited me in my city every year, as I did the same for her.

My husband objected the third baby's name, who was a boy this time, saying:

- I have showed tolerance to you and let you select the first two children's names. May you let me do it this time and choose my baby's name."

Of course, I did not object, even though his father's name was very difficult to be pronounced. However, it was enough for me that it was my husband's warm-hearted father. I could not stop what happened, nor should I gain God's anger through reasoning about the severe pain my father suffered when he was receiving a therapy for a malignant tumor in his head. He finally died with a serious injury in a car accident. It was really painful.

At the beginning, I put up with the shock when my father began to complain about a severe headache. Painkillers were totally useless. However, the shock of the car accident was more than painful.

I used to accompany my father, who had retired two years ago from teaching at the university, for a breakfast in a lovely coffee shop, then enjoy walking at Katara Beach together.

It was a busy morning. As soon as I get out of the crowded street at the gate of the school of my son Mubarak, who became fourteen, the school administration contacted me asking me to come soon. Mubarak had quarreled with one of his colleagues and would not be allowed to continue his school day. I was so furious when I came back to pick him up. This was not his first time doing so. He used to refuse listening to me, as well as he refused picking him up from the front door of the school though he is studying at a private foreign school. He preferred to go with the driver, or I had to park the car far away waiting for him inside lest his friends know that the one behind the wheel was his mother.

I used to comply with all his requests unconvincingly, taking into consideration that he was still too young and immature. I felt very angry with him, at the same time I was concerned about my husband's fury who insisted on staying two more weeks at his work offshore, as he did at the beginning of our marriage, to collect more salary allowances.

At the beginning this method did not affect our marriage, or the responsibility of taking care of our children, since my dad was always beside me. However, he had a good influence on them during their teen age, but lifestyles and priorities changed drastically; I really did not know what happened?

I have enrolled all my children in private schools, but I have not experienced any kind of privacy in our lives?

I came back home yelling out of anger. I was shouting at my son in the house yard; however my father was sitting quietly in the garden making a sign to me that to calm down. I immediately eased my anger while heading towards him. I was about to fall when I bent down at his feet to hear him saying with pain, «take me to the hospital:

- Oh my daughter, the headache is splitting. I have a splitting severe headache.

- May the headache split my head instead of yours! I wish I scarify my life for yours! I wish you've got no harm Dad.

I replied with a nod. My son, whom I was shouting at minutes ago, helped me assist my dad to reach the car, sitting with him in the rear seat putting his head on his chest.

I drove the car insanely dodging the incomprehensible crowdedness that invaded our streets. I entered many service roads, although it was not at distance, until we reached the emergency entrance of Hamad Hospital.

I saw my son, Mubarak, crying and saying that my father didn't respond. The keys of my car fell down while I was getting off. I felt almost dizzy and I was about to fall down, but my eyes were still looking at my father .He seemed sleeping leaning his head on my son's chest, but he was not actually so!

At the hospital's gate, I shouted pointing towards my dad:

"Help please!" Soon a number of paramedics approached and carried him in the stretcher while I was following them fast-paced.

My father entered the Intensive Care Unit for three days. They were the hardest days of my life; my husband was then beside me, and my mother called me more than once.

My father got out of the ICU with a malignant cancer in the brain. The doctor told me so, I wish he did not, He added that it was too late for any treatment; he was in his last stages!

I was about to yell at him accusing him of medical ignorance and of being a failure. However, my husband, my children intervened; my daughter surrounded me with her arms taking me away.

When my dad woke up from his coma he noticed my red eyes

He whispered:

- So, they told you then!

I randomly tried to wipe my tears and set the Shaal (scarf) on my shoulders, and then I said sadly:" Have you known?"

He did not reply. He stretched out his hand asking me to help him to raise and lean his back to the bed.

He quietly said:

- There is an end for everything; I was treated in AL-Amal (hope) hospital a year ago, but in vain. I knew it.

I was sobbing my heart out. He patted my head affectionately saying:

- What is wrong, darling? We would rather be satisfied, it is our destiny!

He grabbed my hands in his. I kissed them again and again. He repeated;

- May God bless you, my daughter; I am very satisfied with you.

I said with a gasp:

- Did you know you were in coma?

He smiled and made me sit next to him; he covered me with his sheet cover and asked carelessly:

- How and why?

I approached more putting my head on his chest, and checked his breath with my hand. I said:

- You had a very low blood pressure that caused the coma. However, thank God you came round again.

He repeated with deep faith;

- Praise is to Allah endlessly.

He then continued watching me settling back on the chair opposite to him, and said:

- Thank Goodness ... This is the best word you utter.”

I calmed down... My dad is very skillful at changing topics; he conversed with me about my three teenagers telling me that what they did was something normal at their age.

I said:

- you are right, but I did not do to you what they’re doing to me now?”

He smiled as he was looking outside the window watching the traffic jam of our teeming city day and night and said stoically:

- Their time is different than yours, and your time was different than mine, and this is what was happening to me and my mother as well.”

He remained silent for a while and then said calmly:

- Look down at the street; have we ever seen our streets crowded in such a way ten years ago? Of course not; it is now a differed time, and we have to adapt.»

I was sitting next to my father in the ambulance when they took him to AL-Amal(hope) hospital. Hope is the opposite of despair. However, I was feeling desperate. On the contrary, my father was feeling hopeful, although he was suffering of a severe pain, which was treated with high doses of powerful painkillers.

Throughout my stay at the hospital, I was staring at him, looking for his lovely lineaments, for everything; I was looking for him even in myself...

- I'm inevitably dead; unequivocally dead!

These were his words he told me last Monday evening. My tears flowed deleting my dreams and my life, and trying to console me.

How could I not to cry while my lovely dad was dying! He said at a moment of painful farewell:

- I'm dead, unequivocally dead!

I did not react, though I was so sad. I knew this, but I was coward; loving him made me a coward person, unable to face life facts.

He told me:

- I am dead, and the dead never come back. I will never ask you to take care of the money or any other silly thing. You have been well secured the moment I taught you praying, wearing the veil and modest clothes, respect others, and taking values into consideration...

I nodded vulnerably. He completed with a faint tone:

- "I advise you not to do anything for me, although I know you are a righteous daughter. You know that I have done everything good for the doomsday. I have built a mosque and a school, dug wells, and many other things which I prefer to keep between me and God.

I nodded agreeing, and was unable to speak. He stretched his hand towards me saying with a pitiful tone,

- "Let your hands embrace mine..."

He paused for about a minute; shed few tears on his pale face, then affectionately wiping his tears he said:

- Hey baby, it's my tears ... It is not because of dust... I cry because I will miss you, but we will meet in Paradise, in the highest paradise if God will."

His smile reflected sweet satisfaction; he let his tears flow successively but bravely, and added:

- What makes me so patient, my dear, is that I am about to meet God, after a long yearning for meeting Him.

Love! What is love? It is me and my father. We love each other, we both love God, and hopefully God always loves us.

Love and parting are friends. We love then part, and after parting love will continue; it is our destiny.

Parting has many faces; the face of remoteness, the face of longing, the face of pain, the face of grief, and many others faces. Parting has many invisible dimensions; no one knows how unendurable they are until he/she suffers of them.

- The last night I spent close to him he affectionately embraced me while lying in his bed and said:

Dearest Mona, I love you.

He looked tired and pale-faced! I hugged his compassionate face with my two hands, kissed his head, his forehead and cheeks:

- I love you, dearest dad.

In that last night he said goodbye using his great parental love phrases and asked me to go back home and return early in the next morning. I agreed for an unknown reason. It was the most difficult day of my life when my father died before my eyes.

I woke up scared of the sound of the alarm. No... It was not the alarm clock; it was the mobile phone ringing. I picked it up with panic from a nearby table yelling:

- Dad ... dad ... Is my dad dead?

The call was regarding my father. However, they asked me to check out the accident's department in the hospital. He was on his way to my son's school with the driver. He was seriously injured in the car accident; the driver died as well.

I was driving to hospital too fast. My father was seriously ill. He was discharged from hospital to handle the problem of my teenage son whose problems never ended. I did not want to blame my son, or pity him as my father used to do; I just wanted to know that my father was okay. When I arrived, I did not know the way I got to the accidents' department. There were many doctors around him. I heard someone saying:

- "He is seriously injured; it is of no use to get him into the operation's room. He is a cancer patient at an advanced stage.

Why was he discharged from Al-Amal Hospital and how?

I approached him, held his hands, and kissed his head. He had pressed my palms lightly before he passed away with a compassionate look on his face. I had put my ears close to his mouth; he was repeating Islam testimony over and over again.

I felt joy for him, and cried for myself. My beloved dad has passed away. Throughout the years, I cried sharing other people pain over the death of their beloved. How then about my own pain now?

Parting is bitter; it is the most difficult experience in life. Getting together is a part of that parting as well. Parting attracts the feelings of despair, frustration and resentment.

How strange life is. It gathers lovers, and separates them without further ado!

I detest parting; I detest its pain and defeats. What is more painful than parting is the devaluing of this feeling. They consider that this pain is discontent and dissatisfaction. Who are they to judge the feelings of human beings? Do they know what fate is?

What if parting vanishes?

Will pain keep having an identity then?

Each time, I wake up asking the same question, however I never get the same answer.

Another start

Fatima Al-Kuwari

From the top of the huge swaying body....lines on the surface of life...high altitude... colored spots, brown, dark gray or black... triangular and hexagonal forms tend to elongate. Vast areas escape from the pulse of life! All of these memories were escaping flowing with no limits. We (I and other travellers) were trying heroically to relax, but the roaring of the plane was disturbing our trials.

A turbulent confusion of raging obsessions, which was making silly anticipations, reverberated behind the scene. Whenever the plane went deeper in the cosmic depth, nausea provoked roaring in our cells which surrendered to the grip of events. I tried to awake my senses and stir my appetite for reading. I went on half-awake.

A hostess came, tall, courageous; she always seemed doing her job perfectly. Her make-up was well done; eye lines, lip sticks, the transparent blue with the red narcissism, which touched her cheeks over the scattered white powder. Then other faces came with the same colors. I was hugging my book. I let my inquisitive to grow and enjoyed watching them. All of them were distributing the same smiles. They were blondes or brunettes with gorgeous outlook stir passengers' inspiration for eternal flow!

Passengers were eating, drinking, belching. I gazed at those desires and the smoke which was drawing distributed twisting lines, that came out with breathes of smokers. Fantasies, moods and turning points massed in the box of images. I clung to the present image and the hiss chaotic sounds. It was a self-meditation surrounded with that of others. I recited some Koran incantation and prayers loudly to pick me out of monotony of time in this open-ended dimension.

Although the screen in front of me pointed out our location but my concentration was a delusion, a mirage in a very hot day.

I said more prayers and incantations. My voice mingled with passengers' grunts and coughs, and some of echoing giggles. Bodies were piled in seats, with flexible belts stretching according to each body size. So sleepy was I that all my senses surrendered.

I resorted to my subconscious... I do not know how long. I felt a faint tremor while I was half awake. A tempting dream called me so I resisted being awake.

I struggled for a surrealistic nap, but a heavy tremor drew my limbs and woke up; I felt the forced heavy landing, then a number of successive declines. We opened our eyes distributed because of Lights of Fasten belts signals. Panic restrained our abilities to move. The usual footsteps in the corridor stopped... I wish I could know what was going on. I nudged my seat companion, who did not respond, to dissolve the cloudy atmosphere of anxiety which began creeping to attack my nerves, I looked at her enviously while taking her nap. There was uncertainty about the lighting devices. There were some drunks who insisted on expressing their thoughts screaming as if singing in an opera.

The staff of the plane tried to pretend that everything was alright, but disturbance was so overwhelming that all kinds of pretense failed. A great query expression was clear on the foreheads. One of the hostesses stood beside me; I tried to remember what I know of her language to ask her for a glass of water as if I didn't care of what was going on. She showed reluctance but she brought it. Ambiguity was a devil that drew his sword. Most of the place drowned in a pool of darkness; all other people began asking for water too, which agitated a busy movement; there was a hustle and bustle so I lost a chance to quench my thirst.

Nothing can be heard but the steps. Hostesses were coming and going, carrying lambs to illuminate the darkness of fear that had invaded our souls. We were in danger. The captain of the plane talked, as if he fired shots of words.

Our looks jumped and our ears caught his words; they were like gunshots penetrating our icy fear.

- Ladies and gentlemen, attention please!

Our senses were alerted.

He continued with the same voice tone as if he was afraid that we couldn't hear him.

- Dears, I don't want you to feel afraid. There is an emergency technical glitch which has hit some of the aircraft devices. Because of feeling responsible I'll have to change the plan and get off at the nearest airport. Out of being responsible, I have to get off in the nearest airport; I hope we'll land safely. I would like to point out that everything is under control, don't worry?

Silence prevailed over cautiousness; quietness swallowed whispers; minds began to restore various memories, human snapshots; feeling nostalgia for the loved ones overflowed as if it was stirring the sympathy of evil in order not to happen.

Wishes hanged in the horizon of hopes was dominated with ambiguity and mingled with desires. No one wanted to pass away abruptly. Tears glimmered after it gathered in the eyes ready to pour down, but still begging for safety by keeping stable. Life-scented sighs raised; eager to land at every one of its stations. I exhumed the memory of my husband, my flight and life companion, by using one dizzy question out of a group of questions which were trembling in front of closed gates of answers in my mind when sharp protrusions rose out of panic.

I wonder if we didn't come back after departure, who would shade those waiting birds?

He surrounded my vague question with fearless smile and unrelenting challenge. Despite the fragility of the situation he extended his hands to embrace my trembling ones and let a feeling of tranquility that lost its way to my veins.

We, the group of the trip, confined our heart pulses in one oxygenic space through patience waves against adversities and then we heard the captain voice carried on waves of our deep feeling of exile open our minds to a new collective experience to land as newborn people.

Time passed and some of our fixed beliefs shacked. Everything was shaking and disturbing the moment too, and disjointed the grip of time .We were praying , trying to get rid of our instinctive love of life and all what was related to it and cleaved to another love .

We felt the angry magnetic force attracting the metal body which we were in. Prayers in different languages, expressing the same hope, could be heard. It was getting down forcibly, the pressure deafened us. We were getting down aware of the fact that we were surrendering to our ignorance of what would come next; where it would land. A loud cracking of bottles and glasses rose when the plane wheels hit the ground.

Suddenly the shadow of death backed died away from our imagination. Feeling safe again made our tensioned nerves relaxed. We all shared a glimpse of gratitude to our Creator.

We stood queued with a deep hope to survive of this stifling plight.

The plane's doors opened; we had a stunned smile. We took a deep breath of a new start.

Shame on You (Haram Aleik)

Mohsen Al-Hajri

She whispered “shame on you” when he woke her up at the middle of night while she was deeply asleep to show off his virility for fifteen or thirty minutes, then he would turn his back to her and go deeply asleep himself. His deep sleep had a known beginning and unknown ending; that he would wake up any time so she had to prepare the bathroom fully for him.

“Shame on you”, she always whispered when they sat together to watch TV. He always watched women and threw his apathetic expressions:

- This is a pretty woman. Oh no! This is more gorgeous, ooh! This one is really Miss of World...this one is of great body...oh, what a beautiful body! ...Glorified Be Allah who created you! What a smile! What eyes....

He didn't care, , but actually he was shooting the heart of her as a woman.

He went on till heartbreaking reached a peak, then he turns to her saying while he was puffing his cigarette's smoke:

- Hope God will compensate me!

“Shame on you”... She uttered in whisper when he gave her a ride, in fact he rarely did. He would drive horribly fast; no turns, no signs or so on, might stop him. His boyish deeds might stop him. He would get out of the car to quarrel with another driver, curse and spit and insult him then he got back to the car while threatening and cursing everybody passing by. Only those women who happened to pass by in their cars would calm him down; he remarkably eased his car speed the same way teenagers would do, but when he noticed a man beside

them or a police car stopped in the neighborhood, he would start out at the highest speed.

She wished she could shout to get out all pain stored in her chest. She was fed up and couldn't get any more of his mocking, gloating, silliness and brutality. She even muted her whispers for fear that her hot breathes would approach him, or he would realize her resentment and discontent; she was afraid he would catch some of her muffled sighs or he would notice her fear when she came close to him.

She got used to that as he had tamed her since her first night with him. She was recalling her wedding night. She was haunted by the shadow of that night. She wanted to forget , but no way. How could a bride do?

“Shame on you!” she couldn't announce it loudly all her life , but once. She told him that at her wedding night. Now she remembered all of that miserable night .she recalled the events quickly in preparation for the start of the show. It is the beginning.

She sat waiting for the first coming of the bridegroom to her room. He was supposed to be happy and ecstatic to be with her alone. She sat watching the door of the room too excited. Fear was in her trembling hands although she tried to look somehow solid. She stayed tuned for his coming in. His huge body coming through the door announced the beginning of the tragedy.

She was sitting at the side of her new bed bending her head because of feeling so shy. Worry and bewilderment exhausted her nerves. For her surprise he was such a cold person, so she waited his entrance silently.

Eventually, he sat beside her. She heard him humming a song , but never looked at her, never talked to her.

He started kissing her lips violently. He showered her with kisses, and with his thick lips he buttoured her neck while his hands captured it tightly. She kept silent although she felt suffocated. He was trying to bend her to him , , but she didn't respond so he threw his weight over her to find herself thrown on the bed looking at him approaching her.

Knockings at the door saved her at that moment.

She adjusted her clothes; her confusion subsided a little while he sat down on the ground and put his dinner in front of him. He hadn't talked to her since he entered. She expected him to ask her to sit down to have dinner with him at least, , but he began to do something else...

He began eating unconcerned about her. He was eating voraciously

He didn't pay the slightest attention to her. She was so surprised at his behavior. She perceived that she should stop feeling shy and sit down with him for dinner as she was so hungry; she waited for him to invite her, but he didn't. She assumed that he forgot etiquette, or he was so hungry. Being so involved in eating assured the second probability. She felt pity for him so she got down beside him.

She waited for him to take care of her and feed one morsel or more by his hand, but he didn't. She was about to take one by herself when he shouted as loud as he could; she startled and threw the morsel looking at him with great dismay and fright. His eyes reddened with anger; she felt as if flames were getting out them to whip her. His first words to her were:

- Listen woman! This is first and the last time you try to eat with me. Me first, then you come to eat after I finish, do you understand, woman?

She was shocked and about to faint, but she held her nerves. She was trembling when saying”

- “Shame on you, shame on you.”

It was the first time she said such words; even it was the first time she declared what was in her mind because she couldn’t utter a word ever after.

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