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Voiceless Voices...

Dr. Pushpa VK

Islamic Azad University, Ahwaz
Iran

A scream passing through the open window at the edge of the marshy lands was fit enough to startle every human soul. Am I startled? Why should I? I won't, I decided. The filtering whispers of leaves in the breeze outside interrupted, yielding to the soft whimper of a young girl. Is it my daughter again? The haunting notes that banged endlessly outside began to dance in my ears. The call of the crickets reigned at the craggy hills where the riding wind halted for a moment hearing the soft moans of a female. Slowly, the leaves begin to whisper again, though slightly muffled, by taking momentum it got ready to scream. Do they listen and repeat the steady sound of my wavering head?

Clouds came from nowhere to wrap the moon along with a shadow with all its mutilated scars and gnarled weather-beaten layers, but solid and stubborn with the darkness of night. Together they began to shake the branches and tear the leaves off in a wild frenzy. Now-a - days they came to survey my fields, my land, and my room before the lights fly away and the darkness creep in. I sensed how they waited stealthily among the dark shades of the thick reeds-growth on either sides of the Karoon river bed and sharpened the claws to pounce on me at the earliest....

I tried to hold my breath for the shadows not to hear me. Why should I scare? It was the right thing to do. I am the father and I have the right do whatever with my children. Suddenly the willow trees at the banks whirled in fury as if resented at my thought.

“Yes, But you didn't have many children. You had just one.”

Suddenly, the feeble voice echoed outside again and the whole wilderness creaked with the fury of it.

“You had just one ‘... “You had just one” ... yes. I had just one...just one child...my flesh and blood. Well, it is her fault ...she didn't obey the society...she didn't follow the scriptures. I wanted to justify myself. Nonetheless I was ashamed to see how I sound like my new wife..

“You say scriptures!” “A believer dares to bury his own baby alive?” yelled the voiceless voices...I couldn't answer. Well how could I do that? I didn't do that...I swear! I wanted to shout. But they could read my silent words...

“You can’t blame others. Where was your conscience? Why did you do it even if others wanted it?” demanded the voices....

My child....She wanted to save me... God save her soulbut it saved none, neither me nor her... What did I know? I just fed her, how did I know she was so lonely within even many years after her mother’s death...she didn’t utter a word when I brought a stepmother for her. “The woman of the house has gone and no one to cook a meal, to look after the child...” The good old excuse! I could be without a wife but got betrothed to a woman before the first one’s grave was dry.....” you are a man, don’t bother, a man can marry even before the 40th day. ” they insisted.

I didn’t know ...may be traditions twist as it fits. And they made me to take off the black dressmy mother ran to the market and bought a red shirt for me to wear...why red? White will do, I told my mother. “No no...” she insisted in her Electra way. What I knew of the outcome. My daughter had already vanished into the background until there were stories about her. I didn’t know who lit the fire, but rumors spread like wild jungle flames extinguishing everything existed...it burnt down all the bonds replacing it with just hatred..... It was that time I planned homicide in my fickle mind; smother her to death when she is asleep...?...to chop her and feed the wild dogs in the wilderness...or warp in black plastic bags and throw into one of the trash boxes before the municipality trucks come to crush the trash...I was fed up of the hidden glances of the neighbors, the sympathy of friends, the sarcasm of the acquaintances, above all the nagging of my second wife...

“Well, if you can’t control your daughter, smother her. You aren’t waiting for the authorities to stone her to death in public at the city center, are you? Don’t say I didn’t tell you in advance...” she whizzed with a weird look in her eyes.

What happened? Why don’t you say?

“Nothing happened!!...I say it before it fully happens” She tilted her head like a preying vulture and spat out the words of sarcasm before turning away in utter disgust. The cascading disgust engulfed me... ...whom to ask..? My daughter won’t tell me..... the gap was always there..... Everything happened suddenly on that night. When I was walking to and fro on the threshold to wade the wanton thoughts away my daughter peeped her head out and murmured..

“Baba, Babaaa.... you awake?....”

“Ghmm...” that meant yes and no..... It was quite obvious that I was awake, might be she wanted to be sure of others.

Before I asked what she wanted from me...she stood in front ready with a spade, hoe and a pick axe in her hands. Seeing my enquiring look she whispered...

“Baba, don’t ask me anything, you just...follow. Just once...”

She then walked away into the darkness, me following...miles and miles into the silence of darkness along the Karoon River. The pungent smell of wild herbs and green grass smothered beneath our feet was slowly replaced with the sharp stinging smell of wet mud. I just followed until she stopped near the willows that stooped into the running waters of the river. She dropped the tools except one and began to dig the open ground with it. I stood watching not knowing what she wants...what the hell? I was about to shout...

“Please...Baba, don’t scold me. Please not today.” She wiped the sweat with the back of her palm and requested.

The earth was wet and loose, it came out so easily...As she went on digging, I could hear her hard breath.....

Moon peeped out from the clouds revealing the ditch she dug....she stood there near the mound of mud she shoveled out...her tiny figure making another silhouette of a dark shadow beside it and I saw the mound on her stomach.. Is it the delicate slender body of my daughter? Before I ask she stepped into the pit, drew the loose mud with both hands feverishly and began to conceal herself in a hurry.

She drew the entire mound of black mud back into the pit in a wild frenzy until it reached till her mouth... I could hear her faint wailing whisper...begging me, “Please Baba, please, help me to fill the pit.”

I could only stare at her not knowing what to do...fill the pit, seal it and put an end to all the rumors, the secret glances, sarcasm and the taunts that have been flashing around.....and she begged again..

“Please father....if you don’t want your daughter suffer...” Her tears glistened in the faint moon light. I began to sob for the first time in my life but I tried to suppress it... a man is not supposed to cry. But picking up the spade I sobbed and began to cover the pit...I saw her mouth, nose; eyes...eye brows, forehead and black hair vanishing into the pit beneath the dark earth leaving only a loose deserted mound of mud on the ground. An owl or two hooted in the early hours...and bats from Elysian Fields chirped wildly. The air was cool and the silence around thickened making me drowsy, weak and giddy.....

Sun was blazing above when I got up the next day.....I felt my limbs go dry and numb; the heavy tongue turning dumb inside the parched mouth. What did I do? Was it just a nightmare.....? Yes .yes a dream. I screamed a wishful cry....

The house was the same except the silent mystery wrapped it. Voices from nowhere banged into my years and phantom figures began to haunt me. Was it or was not.....? The nagging of the new wife has subsided but one thing was sure, something began to munch my brain, it crawled at times but I never doubted my sanity until the day the postman brought a registered letter with a red font at the top written... 'mahramaneh', Confidential? I tore it open eagerly.....

“Dear father,

.....it is about things never told and hard to believe. ...I wanted to be somebody...I wanted to stand on my legs.....whose fault was it? I don't know. My mother's death..? Me being a girl or your marriage to the strange woman who made her sons seduce an innocent child? Baba, I didn't want to be a mother at 16..... I know it was tough for you to grasp...Tough for you to follow my errand....what else was the remedy? Forgive me if I became the reason for your sorrow...

Your daughter whose existence brought you only misery.”