



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Virgin Who Spoke...

Merino Sabu
M. A. English Student,
Deva Matha College,
Kuravilangad.

“...It is said that the palace belonged to the Emperor Shahryar, a prominent figure during the Islamic Golden Age. The trunk was found, almost intact, beneath the rubbles of this palace, much to the surprise of the archaeologists. A thorough inspection of the trunk has revealed its contents – some ornaments, a book with some loose sheets of paper, etc. Specialists are trying to decipher the archaic language, to find out to whom the trunk belonged, although it was found in what was believed to be one of Shahryar’s chambers, where he used to keep the maidens till the morning of their execution. According to legend, Shahryar...”

I clicked off the T.V. and sank back into my easychair. Images from the T.V. danced in front of my eyes. People huddled over a trunk, the loose sheets of paper, and rubbles of the palace. I closed my eyes and allowed my mind to drift back to the well-known stories I have heard about the Arabian Nights – King Shahryar, Scheherazade, the virgins who were slaughtered. I sat back with a sudden realization. “Shahryar’s chambers...Used to keep the maidens till the morning of their execution...Book with loose sheets of paper”. Could those be letters or entries written by those hapless women, the virgins?

I sat gazing out through the window, sipping my coffee. Although I looked calm and composed outside, my mind was firing sharp bolts of imagination and facts. The story was clear. Shahryar, angered by his wife cheating on him, put her to death. As a means of revenge, he set out marrying the virgins of his country and executing them in the morning after the nuptial night. Scheherazade puts an end to this brutality by engaging the emperor in a story-telling routine, giving rise to the *One Thousand and One Nights*.

But what about those virgins who had become scapegoats to the emperor’s vengeance? They didn’t get a chance to speak their minds, they didn’t get an opportunity to avert death. Grabbing my notepad and pen, I set down to write. A thought echoed in my mind – what would have one of the virgins written if she had a chance to write...

Dearest,

This is my last letter, and I thought it would be better to write to you my best friend since my childhood. With the Emperor sleeping on his large bed, and the clock ticking away the seconds of my life, I sat down to ponder over my short life. I wondered whether I had lived my life to the fullest, and whether I was going to die as a happy and contented soul. And I realized my friend, I had never lived. You know my family, you know how girls were treated there. I was nothing but a burden to my parents, a commodity to be sold off at the marriage market. I was not allowed to learn, even when my brothers went off to their schools. I had to learn to cook and to look after the household. I had to knit and sew. These were qualities that made me

marriageable material. But a little rebellious spirit always stood out within me, and I learnt to paint, to read and write, whatever minimum that was allowed in the house. I used to have dreams my friend. I dreamt of riding a horse, sailing a ship, and even travelling all around the world. I dreamt of writing poetry and painting beautiful portraits. I dreamt that I would fall in love, just as the stories say. Sadly, I had forgotten that my life was not lived according to my own dreams. My life was living out the visions and instructions of those around me. I don't understand what part of this vision had lead me to be the young, virgin wife of the Emperor. Was I nothing more than just a pound of flesh that had been haggled in the market and feasted upon? And does nothing of value remain in me after the Emperor had his fill of sexual appetite? I now wonder my dear friend, would my life come to such a drastic end, had I not been a virgin. Could I have gotten a chance to save my life and my dreams, if I had lost my virginity? I guess not. In a world where girls are measured in terms of their purity, their virginity, I guess I wouldn't stand a chance to exit if I had lost it earlier. The sad and only truth is this my dear friend, death is the only real thing that is going to happen in my life, and this death too, sadly, was not one of my wishes.

As the faint streaks of dawn

Paint the sky anew;

As the sun rises

To reveal the truths of a new day;

I wish I had a chance

To live my life and leave behind

Memories, like a brush stroke that leaves

Streaks of colour on the huge canvas;

And so happily I would die, saying

This Life, it was painted by me.

This is what I have realized my dear friend – a life according to our dreams is only the life well-lived. This death is not what I wished for, but now, I am happy. Because, I am the virgin with dreams, I am the virgin who had a zest for life, I am the virgin who spoke...