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## Butcher's Bride

Habib Mohana

Curvaceous Nimra did not have bad looks. She had a BA in social sciences and was somewhat a girl of a refined taste. Voraciously she read fantasy novels, ordered fashion magazines and watched shows that offered beauty tips. She wanted to marry a civil officer, she waited and waited, but her prince charming would not heave in sight. 'The most potent weapon in a woman's arsenal is her beauty and youth and they don't improve with age.' Her friends and relations hassled her.

It was a crisp December afternoon when a match arrived. He was far below the bar she had set but time was not on her side, her looks had stopped improving. Like her, he taught at a private school and his pay packet was modest. They showed her a photo of him and though no oil painting, in a well-cut suit he looked very fetching. Nimra's future in-laws resided in other district of the city and her family did not give her enough time to glean more information about the collective family of her would-be spouse.

Her new house was modest but gigantic. It had a covered area, a small overgrown lawn and a ramshackle shed for cows. Her sprightly father-in-law would look after the cows.

It was her seventh day in her new house and the winter was in full bloom. The call to Morning Prayer was echoing from the nearby minaret but the dark stayed put in the sky, Nimra was woken up by horrible grunts of cows, first she thought it was figment of her imagination but in the background of guttural grunts she caught human voices. Her kohl-rimmed eyes glued with sleep, she groped for her bridegroom, but he was missing. The cow grunts were turning to moans. She swished the curtain off the window, through misted-up panes she peered, in brilliant lights she saw three vague images. They held long knives that were dripping with blood and at their feet lay two cows, their feet struggling in one last ditch effort to save dear life. The bloody knives shone with ghastly sheen. Her dumpy mother-in-law weaving her way between the cows and chopping blocks was helping the slaughterers. Then nattering she was pouring water over their blood splattered hands from a spouted jug. Nimra stood aghast at this bloody scene. She

could not believe it; she had been sleeping with a man who could take a living thing's life with a smile.

They had just skinned the carcasses when the old woman brought them a steaming teapot and they fell to drinking tea, the steam from the naked carcasses was mixing up with the steam of the tea. They were chatting and slurping tea, squatting right in the middle of bloody steaming mounds of beef. Then her mother-in-law was washing the jellied purple lumps off the flour with a chatty bristly broom. Nimra felt that the old hag, any moment, mounting the broom would take off, zoom over rooftops and vanish in a puff of smoke. Nimra felt like chuddeirng. She staggered back and tumbled into her bridal bed and struggled to focus away from the scene she had just witnessed.

A little latter a clamped-out van rolled into their house, hunks of beef were shifted into it, her bull-necked brother-in-law slumped down on the seat with the driver and the van rumbled away.

They had told her that her husband was a teacher but in reality he was a butcher. But her husband was, without a doubt, a teacher. She lay dazed, haunted by the prospect of living with a man whose hands were painted with blood.

The butcher-teacher showered, changed and standing before a man-size ornate mirror was busy spritzing himself with tea rose. A hot bank of sharp scent slammed her sensitive tiny nose. 'Hello darling. Rise and shine...Duty calls. I am leaving.' He looked like a soldier of fortune who had widowed and orphaned several. He spooked her.

'I help my father and my brother with this business. My brother was not smart enough to get any education...No one watches me, honey. We do the bloody work within the confines of walls. When I go out I am a clean guy.' He turned on his toes like a moppet showing her new frock to her doting parents. He stamped a smooch on her cheek and exited. She felt as if he was going to hawk meat.

The night was chilly, her other half sneaked into her furry blanket. He clinched her. He reeked of steaming blood. He pressed his lips against hers, and his smacker tasted of raw beef. He entered her and she felt as if she was entered with a dagger. She felt bleeding like a freshly-slaughtered

cow in the throes of death. Before her ravenous partner she lay like a hunted springbok. Soon it was over.

In no time her husband was snoring like a freshly-slaughtered cow but she tossed and turned and then drifted into a sleep. She dreamt that her husband after trussing her up, slaughters her, flays her and butchers her and hangs huge chunks of her flesh on hooks in his mucky shop. Her screams brought the entire house rushing to their room. She was shaking and her body was burning with a raging fever. Her mother-in-law took her to her room, patted and consoled her, the dawn was breaking when her throbbing nerves calmed.

Before noon they took her to a psychiatrist. He gave her antidepressants.

For a change they sent her to her mother's house. The hyped-up mother invited her old friends to give her daughter a quality time. Her friends said she was having complications with her sexual life. Each afternoon her family took her to the riverside where they would have a cup of tea and a chinwag. Nimra had quite recovered. But whenever her mother brought the name of her new house on her tongue, tears would roll down her pale cheeks.

'Mom their house pongs like an abattoir. They are a pack of dedicated carnivores. The old man loves boiled cow feet, my sister-in-law is crazy after barbequed liver, my hubby cannot do without meatballs and the old woman finds beef stew irresistible. Every time I enter the kitchen some sort of meat is bubbling and cooking. Every time I step into the kitchen a cloud of meaty steam pummels my nostrils.

After one month her father-in-law came to take her to her new house.

Nimra had just fallen asleep when a nightmare struck: She was reading a novel in her cow-themed, bridal room. Her sofas were made out of cow rumps, she had fresh cow skin for comforter, a villous cow stomach occupied the place of the towel, her space-age vases were bleeding cow hearts that were holding wilted cow tails while from the wall in front of her double bed a skinned horned head of cow glared at her.

Then she was a tiny fish in a blood-filled aquarium, she could not tell how she turned into a fish. She felt suffocated; she mustered up all her energy and rammed her pointed cranium into the crystal wall. The glass shattered with a deafening noise, she lay wriggling in a pool of blood and

debris of glass shards. By flapping her tail she wiggled towards the toilet and tumbled into the commode. After decades she was flushed out into a slimy drain. She swam in the cocktail of shit, slime and soapy water. Singing in chorus, a wriggly sheet of tadpoles welcomed her into their oozy world. The tadpoles gangbanged her and she shot up a geyser of blood. Red fluid rained in buckets and the streets turned into streams of blood. On a ruddy torrent she was bobbing like a piece of packing foam, the torrent emptied into a river and she found herself on a cool, clean sheet of water. She relaxed. She reached out to catch at driftwood. Desperately she wrapped her shapely arms around it and squeezed hard. ‘Not so hard, babe! You are smothering me.’ she was lying under her better half, her arms locked around his neck. She felt as if she was hugging a freshly-skinned carcass of a cow. She felt nauseated.