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Little Rohan

Shahid Ahmad

Twenty years ago, the agonizing adversity which convulsed my inner-self, and transformed me into an idol, is badly crawling in my thoughts today. Sitting lifelessly, close to a wall, with my eyes constantly opened. The clock cannot be put back, as it is universally acknowledged. Many times, a day, knowingly or unknowingly, my eyes get stuck at the main door of my home where I saw him the last time. The waiting that hurts me a lot is always on. Heart cries, no more tears to roll down from my eyes. Listening to the children's cackles, I run towards street, and call '*Rohan - Rohan*'. The days have halted their progress to make my each and every moment an hour of melancholy. I am a mother, Rohan's mother.

Thousands of days, in uncountable costumes, have been visiting but that dreadful black day has permanently sheltered around me. It never let me leave alone. I well remember - it was June 20, 1995. After routine errands, I was sitting in one of the rooms at my home and gossiping with my mother and sister-in-law. We often sat together to chat and relax. In the same room, my elder daughter and little Rohan were playing on the floor. They were immersed in their world and we in ours.

June lengthens the days by spreading its heat, and when the heat is compressed, it stretches nights to shorter. Usually, no rains fall in June. But that long day was different from rest of the days. Black clouds and thundering were hovering on our heads since the morning. The sun and clouds were playing hide and seek in the sky. These sudden changes in weather made me hurry to run routine errands. Gradually, the blackish clouds became thicker and indicated the rainfall. My sister-in-law helped me to finish the jobs on time.

Talking while combing, my sister-in-law knotted my mother-in-law's hair into many braids, and finally into a ponytail. After five days, this job of combing would be repeated. After some time, my mother-in-law laid down for a sound sleep, and then my sister-in-law stood up, left that cot and came on the one next to me. We talked for a while, but due to the tiredness, I started yawning. My sister-in-law called me, '*Anita, bhabhi*', but listening to my '*humn... humn*', she convinced that I was half-sleeping. For a minute or two, she looked around and finally slept.

The children were busy in their unnamed games. With the passage of time, they got bored and slept where they were, on the ground exactly.

After spending some time in the black world of sleep, I stepped into the colorful world of dreams. The beautiful world of dreams hit my sleeping mind and woke it up. Everything, except my brain, was sleeping. The dream that knocked on was a dream of which every single mother is desirous; the dream of her son's wedding. Yes, it was the dream of my Rohan's wedding.

As soon as the dream began, the restless drops in the black clouds started kissing the ground. The rains accompanied the dream, and together both were stepping forward. The days and nights of twenty-three years helped grow up Rohan a tall, strong physique and handsome youth. He was looking like a prince; wearing a turban with feathers on, and a maroon *Shervani* clinging to his broad chest and rolling down to feet. The tiny round-shaped small flowers rested on the tips of his shoes were adding further beauty to his grand look. Everyone, including my friends, relatives, and villagers were witnessing and enjoying the evergreen moments. The home was covered with countless tiny flickering bulbs. In fact, they were smiling and congratulating Rohan. Sharpening his mustaches, my husband was wearing a white *Dhoti* and *Kurta*. I was wearing a flowered, deep red sari, and holding a plate of rice in my hands. As Rohan moved, I would shower rice on him as an omen.

After a while, the rains stopped, and let the dream proceed alone. The rains filled some of our pots, the small ditches, and made the courtyard slippery. A water storage tank, made of concrete along with a pipe, was set at a minor distance to the main door. Usually, the tank remained almost empty, but on that day, the rains filled it up.

At the main door, the owner of the decorated horse was waiting for Rohan, the groom. One of Rohan's friends, standing next to the horse, amusingly said, '*Dear groom, the ride is ready for you, come on.*' Rohan smiled and stood up. As soon as he got up, the sound of drums increased, people started dancing and calling '*Rohan, Rohan*' and made the scene even more exciting.

After standing up, Rohan started looking around. He found everyone sleeping, a golden chance, hence stepped out into the courtyard. He was leading all of us. He enjoyed his journey throughout the courtyard. The toys were Rohan's feet for the wet soil. Getting enough space

between the little toes, the soil was moving freely; playing with the little toes and making funny sounds. He stopped beside the fully decorated horse at the main door, looked around, and smiled at me. His smile asked me to get on the horse. Happy and excited, I was.

Holding the pipe, Rohan was continuously smiling. I smiled at him too and nodded in yes. Getting my permission, he moved on. He mounted on the horse and went closer to the tank. The marriage procession was ready to be off. My Rohan would lead the procession. I had never seen such delightful moments in my life.

For standing on his little toes, he gave extra force to stand upon and finally dipped his hand into the water. This incredible touch of water forced him to stay there. His drenched hand began moving quickly. *Chhapaak - chhapaak*, the sound of the water in motion bounced up and tickled his face. The time had spread its wings to make his stay longer. Not a single one to stop him there. In this play with water, he left the pipe and dipped his other hand too. Now his both hands were swinging, and his little chin was crossing the tank's edge and getting itself wet. Bending himself, he took his face closer to the dancing water. His little eyes were closely observing the details of the water. The water was also enjoying Rohan's company; sometimes it kissed his little nose, sometimes touched his forehead, and sometimes rolled over his red cheeks.

While playing, Rohan initiated rotating around the tank. The wonderful experience with the water made him forget the place where he was at. While moving around, he reached on the other side of the tank where the soil was uplifted and was making the location sloppy. As soon as he stepped on there, he slipped. I saw him going slowly as the procession started moving. Mounted on the horse, Rohan was leaving and constantly looking at me. His horse and his body were forward, but his face and eyes were backward at me. We looked at each other. I saw him going - going slowly--far--very far till he disappeared.

All of a sudden, my eyes opened. I wanted to see at first the one who was in my dream, my little Rohan. Smiling, and in the mood of kissing him, I got up and looked at the place where he was playing with his sister. Only his sister, I found there. Quickly I scanned the whole room. Everybody was there except Rohan. His absence made me surprised and disappointed. I walked out in haste, and called him twice, "Rohan, Rohan." Unfortunately, no answer came. There was not any single sound even neither of dropping anything, of laughing nor of crying, nothing. This

silence made my heart beating heavily. I ran into the next room and observed thoroughly, I saw everything but could not see him. Then I started crying. The droplets of tears started to appear in the corners of my eyes. Left the room and I headed towards the main door as sometimes he used to be outside in the street.

When I was about to reach the door, something strange in the water storage tank grabbed my attention. Halted, and I moved towards the tank to check what it was. After a few steps, when my eyes touched the figure in there, the inconvenient feelings attacked my heart. My mind stopped its functions, eyes became wider, and my soul shook. Frozen I was and could not take a step more.

He was none other than my little Rohan floating with bare feet in a green t-shirt. Half of his body was inside the water and the half outside. No movements. I never saw him so standstill before. He used to say ‘*mamma - mamma*’ whenever he saw me, but that day I was very close to him and he did not utter a single word. He did not run towards me. He did not blink his eyes. He did not move his body. Promptly ran to hold him in my arms, and I cried loudly, “*Rohan – Rohan - my Rohan.*” After two or three steps, I fell down; darkness covered my eyes and I got my throat choked. In a couple of seconds, lying unconscious, I was on the ground.

When my Rohan was falling down, the clung clay to his feet was losing its grip. The leap that took him inside the tank, kept his head and hands down and legs upward. The water first brought him to the bottom, and then on the top. It seemed that the water was still playing with him, but the game was changed. In this deathly game, Rohan could dip twice only. At the third time, he could not go down, remained on the top only.

On the surface of the water, **my little Rohan was lying, dead.**

Biographical Note:

Shahid Ahmad was born and raised in Mewat, Haryana [INDIA]. He is a teacher and short-story writer. He usually pens the dark themes of death, rape, and murder. He has published his short stories, ‘A Murder’, ‘Facing Death’, and ‘The Last Night of My Life’ in international journals and magazines.