

The Reawakening

Noor dashed out of the washroom cursing her inexplicable need to pee during examinations. She was in a haste to finish her essay and submit the paper. For the first time in years, she had actually enjoyed writing the language paper. Moreover she was glad that her terminal examinations would finally end. She and Aisha would go out after school to have mouth watering kebabs and falafels with their treasured pocket money. Her mama had asked her to return by dusk. Her parents, usually liberal, had become very cautious since the uprising in their city, Damascus had landed the whole of Syria in perpetual unrest.

The photograph of the bruised thirteen year old Hamza al-Khateeb in the front page of the newspaper had grieved Noor's tender heart. But the zest of youth eclipsed the disturbing memory as the ensuing months brought with them scores of activities, teenage infatuations and the pressure of innumerable examinations.

She was unusually contented with her essay. Out of the given topics, she had found 'Tomorrow' most appealing. In her essay, she had woven dreams of a beautiful world- a world where boys like Hamza would fly kites and run through lanes without a care in the world, where peace and love would overflow, a world where she would become a renowned cardiologist like her father and bring hope to ailing hearts, where all girls of her age would attend schools and get their share of dignity and freedom, a world that she would help create through her little efforts, a world that she would gift to the coming generations. To her annoyance, her bladder had not let her finish her essay in peace.

The washroom and her classroom were at opposite ends of the campus. As she walked briskly towards her classroom, there was a sudden deafening noise and a brilliant light that almost blinded her. When she opened her eyelids, she was baffled.

A flying shrapnel had lodged itself in her left arm and warm blood trickled down her right ear. As she pulled out the shrapnel, blood soaked the white sleeve of her shirt. The building in front of her had collapsed like a deck of cards. Dragging herself through the debris, she came across mangled bodies and notebooks caked with blood. What horrified her more than the ghastly sight was her own numbness to it. As she reached her classroom, she saw a burnt hand jutting out from the rubble in the place where Aisha had been sitting. Noor felt inordinately nauseous. And was incapable of movement. Her vomit drenched her bloodied shirt as she stood transfixed.

“Are you alright, Noor?” asked Sir Alex kindly.

Noor was jolted out of the thoughts of her harrowing past and brought to the present. As she looked at the children around, she remembered how she and some other students were rescued by a teacher who had survived the bombing with some injuries and taken to the hospital where her father used to work, where she learnt her parents, who had come to pick her up at school, probably out of anxiety, had succumbed to fatal injuries. After Noor discovered that her house had been requisitioned, her teacher had brought her to this Temporary Accommodation Centre in the Hatay province of Turkey. Sir Alex taught English to the refugee children here. Unlike most of the children, Noor still liked to read and learn. It usually helped her distract her mind from her nightmares and gave some purpose to her otherwise meaningless life. Sir Alex enjoyed teaching her too.

Sir Alex said, “ Noor, we will write an essay today. Our topic is 'Tomorrow' . I am looking forward to read yours.”

“But I have nothing to write on it”, said Noor bitterly.

“Give it a try”, said Sir Alex hopefully.

As Noor lifted her pen merely to satisfy her teacher ,the words flowed through her inadvertently. It was then that she realized that despite all the disillusionment, there was a flickering beacon of hope in her cold heart which reawakened her dream of a better tomorrow – a tomorrow that she felt responsible to usher in.

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