

“DOWRY”

It was strange, but nothing except knitting could calm the old lady down. You'd think those two knitting needles and the ball of yarn was connecting the favorite parts of her life. The sweater will be just the life of her. Her hands paged every moment of her memories and she was imagining each one in a second as on a big screen. Her fingers were moving fast and in directions over which she sometimes had no control. Occasionally she would attempt to turn a page forward or backward carefully as if they had made a movie of her life and she had the remote control to fast forward or rewind it. Imagining the needles working as a remote control, she was able to see her life as long as she wanted and as fast as she wanted. Whenever her grandchildren were using the yarn as a ball, or if there was a knot in the middle of the yarn or someone walked in, all would interrupt her dream. Her hands would stop and not follow the nerve impulses. Then she would drop the needles and chase the children like a mother yelling at them. Not that she hated them or wasn't kind to them. On the contrary she would cry for them easily and miss them every moment.

These days, occasionally she would stare at a point for about half an hour and not pay attention to any thing surrounding her. It seemed she was deaf, mute or better to say: a breathing statue.

She was so skillful in knitting that she would knit with the knots so that no one could see the knots. Other times when she made a mistake she would nervously undo it angrily and start from the beginning. One of the reasons she would make mistake was because the damn radio was broadcasting the war news. The old man would circle between the Israel, British or American broadcasting news. This would make her nuts. The static of the turning channels would change her channel of thought and break her dreams. All she wanted was a piece of quiet and silent moment but the radio was very important to the old man and he would not turn down the volume.

“The static of your damn radio along with the screaming of the children make me crazy and nut. You all are getting on my nerves. I will smash your radio if you don't watch It.,” said the old woman.

Later she would feel sorry and embarrassed talking to her husband. That way She knew he didn't have any hobby and was as saddened by the whole situation as she was. When he would hear good news on the radio, happiness would glow from his eyes. He couldn't sleep at night. He would dream about the news. Before going to bed, he would turn to her and say: “It won't take long. They can't rule much longer.

One of these days..." But the old lady with the tired eyes and mind would not allow him to finish the sentence: "You always say this. It is almost five years that this radio of yours says the same thing. They are sticking to their chairs harder and harder. Ruling more rigid every day".

She had to unravel couple rows afterward. It was hard to unravel and start again. You should be careful to follow the map.

"Girl, how many times have I told you stay out of it. Politics is not a woman's place. By the way, if you and me became a huge flame, we still couldn't burn anything. You are only 22 years old. It is getting late. Your aunt is very anxious. She wants you to marry her son Mohammad, who loves you and I know you love him too. Leave politics for the politicians and don't play stupid childish games. To us poor people, it doesn't matter who comes to the power. Put your head down. Live like the others. Youth and beauty won't last forever. Leave it alone before it is too late,..."

Then she would mumble that this disaster was completely the old man's fault. He could have stopped her from falling into this chaos. If he had done something about it when she asked him to, their daughter would have not been in this situation. All of her sisters got married. They all have houses of their own; have wonderful children and seem happy. Probably it is her brother's, their son's fault. At least he was smart. "Well I am okay with him. Occasionally he will let us know that he is alive hiding somewhere. But how easily she fell in their trap."

She remembered the night when her daughter was being arrested. First the guards surrounded the house; some of them entered the house (there was not a court order). Then they searched everything and everywhere. They looked at picture albums one by one. Then they took any picture that was related to their daughter or son.

Again sagined and numbled: "pictures.... What memories. It seems it was yesterday."

Her heart was pounding. Her hands were shaking. But since she didn't want to undo the knitting, she paid more attention to what she was doing and concentrated on her knitting.

She was counting with her fingers how many times she had visited her daughter. In the last five months she had visited her only three times. The first two months, there were no visiting privileges. Every day she returned home tired and without visiting privilege.

There was only a ten-minute visit allowed and every time she would stay up all night. While her eyelids were falling and it seemed she was going to sleep, her mind was searching of what to say when she was visiting her daughter or reviewing the last conversation. She remembered the last visit: “ Mom, how are you?” “ How is every one?” “ How is dad? My sister? Brother?” It sounded like there was an emphasis on the last one and a blink after. She loved her daughter’s blink. Exactly like her childhood, coquettish and innocent. She was the youngest of the family and of course the cutest. She always could get away with anything. She was stubborn, a determined kid.

She could imagine her face. Exactly like her picture on the wall: she was lovely with her prominent cheeks, elongated eyes and the long lasting smile. Her hair seemed shorter on the last visit. Maybe she cut it short; it is hard to see it under the mandatory scarf. What beautiful hair she had. It was long and smooth, falling over her shoulders. She always had to tuck it under her scarf.

She remembered every detail of the last visit. There wasn’t one moment that she could have forgotten.

She started to stitch the arm to the body and was planning to start another sweater. It was a long time to the winter. Wind was blowing through the cracks of the window, rattling it. It was blowing so hard that it would burn your cheeks if you were out. The last leaves of the maple trees were falling on the sidewalks. Bare branches were moving and roaring on the road like a snake (in search of biting someone on the road). Occasionally you could hear the sounds of a couple small cracks of the branches.

Last night, like the past couple of nights, the old lady was sitting in the corner of the room, underneath the window. Around her in different sizes were the colorful balls of yarn, moving around as if a powerful hand held each knot.

She had made sweaters for almost everyone in the house: her husband, her grandchildren, her kids and even for herself. The last one was made for her daughter in jail but they did not allow her to give it to her. In spite of that she started the new one in hopes of being able to take it to her daughter. Now she was finishing the collar.

She knew her daughter did not like the turtleneck, because she felt choked in it. So the old lady decided to make a v-neck style.

It was dark outside. It was exactly eleven o'clock PM. The noise from the radio came inside the room in different waves, sometime low, sometimes high. No matter what level, it all buzzed in her ears.

She made a mistake and missed a stitch. She unraveled a couple of rows and started over. It seemed she had lost her skill. She used to knit without looking at the needles. Knitting was a skill like typing. Fingers move with motions. Her fingers used to move magically and fly between the needles without the control of her eyes. She unraveled a couple more rows. Her mind wandered over all kinds of thoughts: "Visiting". Her thoughts got stuck right there. Her fingers couldn't move any more. She tried to control them but it seemed they were numb or may be not a part of her body. Certainly they wouldn't follow the nerve pathways.

"Mom, they are going to take me to court soon."

"What is going to happen to her? I hope they find her not guilty. Well, she hasn't done anything. She was just a proponent of the group. That's all. Humans can think and can be for or against. We all have a brain and it should function."

Maybe she had done something. How in the world would the old woman know? It seemed she was aware of this feeling inside of herself. She wasn't sure of her wish. Especially with all of the chaos and hardship at visiting hours. She had heard all kinds of controversial stories there. A lot of times the stories were unbelievable. No it could not be possible. People like to exaggerate reality all the time. Well there are some injustices taking place, but if the situation were really as bad as the rumors circulating during visiting hours among the prisoner's parents, surely the media would mention some of it.

"No, My daughter has not done anything." Maybe they will keep her in jail for a year. It is good for her. She will face reality and understands society's rules. Well, five months is past now and only seven more months are left. That is not much. Well, I will see her seven more times and then she can come back home and start life fresh again.

The sound of the stubborn radio was still buzzing in her ears. The wind was howling like a wolf and the cold was creeping from the corner of the window. Her mind was a fearful tunnel, scary thought running through it. Her adrenaline was soaring and she didn't know why she was feeling this way.

"Damn, he makes me want to go and grab that damn radio from his hands and smash it on the floor and break it to pieces".

The knitting was still in her hands but her fingers had no feeling. They looked limp. They wouldn't move. It seemed they were glued to the blouse, stuck to it. She wanted to lay the knitting down but instead she lay down by herself. She had a backache.

The cold was seeping into her body. The sound of the radio stopped. It seemed that the old man was tired of playing around with it. She was sure that now the old man was leaning on the wall in the hallway, squatting, his head up with eyes closed thinking. She didn't have a moment doubt that he was thinking the same as she was. For a long time the husband and wife were quietly talking to each other with their eyes. Their hearts, their eyes, their body movements were all words and sentences connecting this old couple to each other. It seemed that what was dreadful to say openly was easier to communicate by the eyes: straight and openly. This way was bearable and unargumentive.

No noise was coming from the other side of the wall. The room was quiet. Only silence occupied the air. When the children and grandchildren made a lot of noise and played loudly in their house, she begged for a quiet place to roam; But now the silence mixed with fear was in her mind. She longed for the noise of her family to feel secure and calm.

She pretended that was not alone. She had flights of thoughts. She was full of proponderous wishes. Every night her hands worked but tonight they felt numb. Every night she forced herself to keep busy with knitting but tonight it was unbearable. Time passed slowly. Her fingers had no power to knit. Several times she tried and failed to lay the needle down. Her darn fingers were stuck to the needles like glue. Tonight seemed to be a night of silence. The wind was picking up. It seemed unusual but she couldn't figure out why. The minute hand was moving slowly. It seemed it was 11:00 PM forever.

The sound of car breaks broke her train of thoughts. It startled her. "What was that?" she asked herself. It seemed that suddenly in the middle of the night the street was crowded with cars and she had not noticed the passing cars with squeaking brake. All of a sudden the same hands that had been stuck to the knitting needles now threw them down. It seems as if she had no control over this action. It was her response to panic - a fight or flight reaction.

The window looked out onto the street. They lived on the third floor. From their floor she could see the street. She tried to get up and open the window, wanting to know what was happening out there and why it was different tonight. But her feet

were stuck to the floor like cement. She was unable to move. She was cemented to the floor. No, maybe she was afraid to see what was happening out there. No, it was her gut feeling that was preventing her from getting up. Someone or some thing in her gut was telling her to sit. Don't move. She seemed was dreaming or maybe....

The ring of the bell broke her resistance to getting up. She turned to the door but still could't move. Her eyes were staring at the door with the hope that her old man would open it. Her eyes went toward the sweater. She felt that she had the power to move. Well, it was enough to get up and open the door. She was in doubt. Who could it be? We are not expecting anyone. Certainly at this time of the day. "...Maybe.... My little girl is free..."

The distance between her and the door wasn't more than five steps. She went forward. Now she was right behind the door when she heard the second ring. She pulled the doorknob down. The old man was right next to her. It seemed that neither one had the power or guts to open the door. Their eyes met with no meaning. Their silence broke off with the elongated third ring.

Now they could see the shadow of a person behind the glazed window in the door. Unrecognizable though. She paused then suddenly made a decision. With strong willpower she firmly opened the door. Her frightened but curious eyes fell on a revolutionary guard who seemed very young. She could hear her own heart beat and pulsetile jugular arteries. Her hands started to shake. Her adrenergic hormones started to rush all over her body. She was afraid to ask any questions or what in the world he wanted in the middle of the night by knocking on their door. Maybe they arrested her son now; maybe... she was full of fears and scary thoughts. Her tongue was tight. She was dead silent. She wanted to say: "what in the world do you want in the middle of the night?" No. She couldn't say that. Maybe there is more than this one. They usually hide all over the street and only one shows in front of the door. But last time there were a couple of them at the door, and when they saw the door opened all rushed in like a herd and searched the entire house. The guards splashed, pandemoniumed and stampeded the entire house. They did what Ganges khan did to Iran and the Barbers to Persia. They destroyed the wallpapers in hope of finding secret wholes in the walls. They dug up all of the flower gardens in the first floor. They stepped all over the garden flowers in search for guns and ammunitions. After destroying the garden and rooting around the house, trampling every thing they did not find a thing but still walked away like conquerors without apology.

No, this is not the same activity. This is not about her kids. This guy looks alone. What could have happened? Maybe her daughter is free. He probably wants them to go to the Evin (political jail located in north of Teheran) and sign some documents for her release. Well, she has heard of such incidents in the past. But why in the middle of the nights. They could have called to tell them about it. What a strange night. All kinds of thought entered her mind. She was in search of another reason for the guard to appear in front of their house in the middle of the night when the guard said: “sorry bothering you in the middle of the night. I had an order to come here to see you and give you the news.”

“News? News? News? What news?” she asked.

“Well, let me tell you mam.”

The old lady could not wait. She was noticeably unsteady on her feet. Her mind wandered.

“Well say it. Hurry up.”

“Your daughter...”

“What about her... What happened,” She replied fearfully.

“Well, wait. Don’t rush me.”

“For the sake of god. What about her?”

“She got married last night.”

“Are you nuts? Got married?”

“She married me last night.”

“Are you crazy?”

“ And she was hanged today.”

“What?”

“Now I am here to pay her dowry.”

“No. That is just a lie. Perhaps a joke.”

“Her dowry was five dollars.”

“You just want to torture us.”

“In Islam hanging a virgin is prohibited and is not accepted,”

“You, ... you liar, you just want to torture us.”

“You can come in the morning and get her body.”

With the last sentence the old lady could not move but her hands were stuck to the guard’s collar, like it had stick to the knitting needles. She wouldn’t let go.

“No...you ...liar.... Dowry...wedding...dead body...

She fell down.

Outside the wind was still blowing, whipping through the trees on the left and right. Moving their branches around strong. It seemed like a tornado on the way. You could hear the snapping of the young branches. THE YOUTH.

From: Dastanhaye Dehkadeye Evin by N.Fakhteh

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