**Blind to the Light**

## By Maryam Saadat

The last thing she remembered was the look on his face. How his bright and cheerful smile had turned into a gloomy frown, as if all hope had been lost, as if she took away his reason to live. It haunted her day in, day out. What she had done was cruel. It was as if she had stabbed him in front of all their enemies. *Their enemies?* How peculiar. Were they allies? Was there an invisible bond that she had destroyed with her own hands? Or were they just ordinary people who happened to cross paths? Whatever it was, it at least managed to break her.

She woke up in a hospital bed with an IV drip attached to her hand. Slowly she opened her eyes and tried to adjust them to her surroundings. She struggled to get up but her arms lost all their strength and she landed on the bed again. Her entire body ached. It was as if she had been hit by a truck. She noticed a letter on the table beside the bed. She picked it up and read the content:

*Maryam when you wake up come home and study, you have an exam tomorrow. ~ Mom*

She sighed deeply. Typical of her mother, ‘*she cares more about my grades then she does about me’*, Maryam pouted. A nurse finally came and told her that she had passed out due to stress and weakness and gave her some pills to take. When she got discharged she thanked the doctor and the nurse, went out of the hospital and threw the pills in the nearby trash can. ‘*Yeah thanks but no thanks, I don’t want to depend on those poisonous pills ever again*’.

By the time she came out of the hospital, the sun had already set and the street lights were the only lights guiding her along the way. The moon was peeking through the clouds but still shy enough to present itself wholly. Her mind treaded back into her memories. She couldn’t help it. She just let her head do whatever it wanted. She remembered odd things; like how her father used to carry her around on his shoulders when she was young, how her sister tied her braid because she couldn’t do it herself, how her brother would tell her he had a surprise for her and ask her to close her eyes and put her hands in front of her and she would expect him to give her sweets but he’d put snails in her hands and how he laughed out loud and ran as she cried on discovering the surprise he had given her and would tell her mother who ended up scolding her older brother. She remembered how fresh the early mornings were when they would go on their Sunday walk, how her mother rarely ever smiled and how her father used to laugh at everything she did. She remembered how her parents argued and how she would hide her head under her pillows wishing that they would stop, how her mother scolded her elder siblings for not getting good grades, how her father yelled at them and how her mother tried defending them and would end up arguing again, how there was barely any love between her parents and how she was brought up believing that humans are incapable of loving.’

She chuckled as she recalled her memories. ‘*Odd things we think about at odd* *times*’ she smiled as she turned around the corner of the street. But then again there was today, the day when finally she was the one who had been the culprit. She did that one thing that no ethical human should ever do, that is to give someone hope and then when they are able to stand, slide the floor from under their feet. It wasn’t like she did it on purpose, it was only that she was an oblivious idiot to think that humans were actually capable of being trusted. And she did the one thing wise men don’t do - become a fool.

The lights on the street were pretty dim, and strange people would walk around staring at her. She felt insecure. She tried to put up a brave front nevertheless. But she finally noticed that there was someone who had been following her for quite some time now. Yet she dared not look back. She was still feeling weak and knew she could not outrun her stalker. Her throat felt dry, her heart was beating fast while her head resonated with it at the same pace. She realized that there was a convenience store across the street and she could get help from there, so she walked towards it. But it was as if her pursuer realized what she was up to that he started walking fast. She tried to call out but her lungs wouldn’t let her, she gasped for air, he was 10 feet away, she tried to run, he was 6 feet away, she suddenly tripped, and he was standing above her.

He reached out his hand to grab her, but she cracked, “Get away from me!”, as she pushed herself from his grasp, avoiding to look at him for the fear of being haunted.

“What in the world are you doing you idiot?! Get up!” a familiar voice exclaimed.

She looked up and saw her brother standing in front of her with a furious look on his face. She finally breathed. “I’m not an idiot you’re the idiot for creeping up on me, you idiot!” she said as she stood up and brushed herself.

“I called out to you but you didn’t respond, you were lost in your own world”, he sighed.

“Well it’s still your fault for giving me a heart attack! I just came out of the hospital!”

“Yeah I know, I was coming to pick you up but you just walked by me as if you were blind”

“Hmph” she pouted.

“Well anyway how are you feeling?” Saad asked.

Saad was the only person who she could comfortably talk to, he was a good listener and gave great advice. Unlike her sister, Sarah, who was not a good listener and would impose her own gossips since she believed all the things that Maryam would talk about were rubbish. So instead of listening to Maryam whine about how her professor scolded her during class, she’d rather talk about the new fashion magazine that just came in. But Saad was by her side whenever she needed him and she knew she would do the same for him as well. Except if the matter is pertaining food, then the deal is off as there is no such thing as compromising when it comes to food.

“Well aside from my knees hurting because ‘someone’ made me trip on the street, yeah, I feel pretty much like trash, thanks for asking”.

“Oh no problem” he replied as they both laughed heartily.

For a few minutes they walked silently, they did not speak and they weren’t even bothered by it. The weather seemed pleasant, and the world seemed to be in harmony. The silence was not awkward in the least, it was just a comfortable space where they both relaxed and breathed.

But Saad finally broke the silence, “ There isn’t much to eat at home” he said as his stomach grumbled, “ahh, I’m in pain, look how much pain you’ve made me go through, the least you can do is buy me a decent meal” he nodded as if agreeing with himself.

“Hm, alright, what do you want to eat?”

“You’ll seriously buy me food?!” he asked as he pretended to be in shock.

“Haha, I’m not poor, I just got my pay tod…”, she was suddenly reminded of the events that took place.

Saad noticed the look on her face and sighed.

“So what happened this time?”

It took her a minute to gather her thoughts.

“It’s complicated” she replied.

“Then let’s take the long route home”

“… Alright”

“Well I’m all ears”

“I don’t even know where to start! Hm, let’s see, so there’s this guy at work…”

“EW! Hold up, if this is some sort of love story then I am out, Sarah deals with those kinds of things, tell her instead”

“No! It’s not like that just listen okay? He’s just a coworker, and he already has a girlfriend, and I’m even happy for them, this is by no means a love story!”

“Hm” Saad looked at his youngest sister and thought deeply, she wasn’t blushing and had a serious expression so he decided to believe her.

“Alright continue then”

“Okay so, the thing is today we were going to vote for the employee of the year, and he was nominated for it and I told him I would vote for him, but suddenly he got into this fight with this other guy at work who was also nominated, and things got weird, so I finally stood as nominee as well thinking I could fix everything, but ultimately it backfired, some of his voters ended up voting for me instead, and he lost to the other guy. He had already told me how much that position meant to him but I…”

She gagged as she cried and covered her face with her hands. She gasped for air and cried while talking,

“…I stabbed him in the back! And he looked at me as if I were trash, and when I apologized to him he made that face, his eyes told me my apologies would never reach him and he turned away”

“…After that I thought so much about it that I ended up spilling my guts in the staff room. And suddenly my legs lost all their energy and I fell unconscious, his face still embedded in my head”

Saad offered her a napkin and she blew her nose, it felt so good to talk about it with someone.

“…I felt so sad, I wondered how God would forgive me if he doesn’t”, she sobbed, “I feel terrible”.

“Well from what I heard, I think….” He replied, “…that you are even stupider then you think”

“Huh?” she looked him. Did he not hear her properly?

“See there is something you need to know about yourself, and that is that you can’t be the hero of every story, so don’t go jumping into fights that do not concern you in the first place, especially if it’s between guys”

“Secondly, he has every right to be mad at you, but if he is as kind as you claim him to be, then he will come back around don’t worry, guys are just like that, so don’t think too hard about it,…. We already have more depressing matters to think about back at home” he sighed.

And she understood by what he meant, she needed to focus more on her family then her surroundings. So she stopped crying and wiped her eyes.

“Yeah… how’s mom doing?” she asked.

“Well she was pretty upset with you, she wanted you to study for those Law exams of yours, are they starting from next week?” he inquired.

“Nope. Tomorrow” she replied plainly.

He paused and looked at his daring sister.

“I know you were stupid, you even told me how even stupider you are but you must be the greatest one alive probably” he jested.

“Yeah, someone give me a Noble Prize” she chuckled.

Suddenly Saads phone began to ring. He took it out of his pocket and looked at the screen to see who was calling.

“It’s Sarah, maybe she wants to talk to you” he said as he picked up the phone.

“*Hey Saad! Hurry up and come home already moms throwing one of her tantrums again! I can’t cope with this on my own! And dads getting angry as well!”*

*“*Alright we’re almost back, keep the door open”

“….”

“Sarah?”

“…..” Saad heard the sound of breaking plates and a loud scream.

“Sarah! What’s going on?!” Saad shouted, as he started walking faster worried about what might have happened.

On the other side of the phone sobbing sounds could be heard. And suddenly the line cut.

Saad and Maryam realized something went wrong, dashed towards their home. Maryam’s body was already aching yet she pushed it to its limits.

When they reached the gate shouts could be heard and some of the neighbors had gathered around wondering what might have happened.

“YOU ARE THE REASON WHY MY CHILDREN ARE FAILURES! THEY ARE GOOD FOR NOTHING! JUST LIKE YOU! ALL YOU’VE EVER DONE IS BOSS ME AROUND! I HAVE SPENT 23 YEARS OF MY LIFE AS YOUR SLAVE! YOU HEAR ME? AS YOUR SLAVE!!” their mother’s voice could be heard.

“Mom! Please stop! This isn’t good for your health!” Sarah’s gentle voice was also audible.

“SHUT UP AND GET AWAY FROM ME! THIS MAN IS THE REASON WHY YOU ARE A FAILURE! WHY YOU WILL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE! YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A FAILURE! AND HE THINKS THAT HE IS SO CLEVER! THAT HE IS THE BRIGHTEST MAN ALIVE! THAT HE HAS HIS WIFE UNDER HIS THUMB! HAH! AS IF I CAN BE UNDER THE THUMB OF THE LIKES OF YOU! YOU DISGUSTING MAN! GO BACK TO YOUR PARENTS HOUSE AND FLIRT WITH THE WIVES OF YOUR BROTHERS! THEY SEEM TO BE INTERESTED IN YOU AS WELL!” the mother screamed.

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE TO LECTURE ME ABOUT WHAT I SHOULD DO? WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE HUH? YOU BELONGED TO A MEAGER FAMILY! KNOW YOUR PLACE WOMEN! DAY BY DAY, ALL YOU DO IS COMPLAIN! HAVE YOU EVER BEEN GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE? YOU CRAZY WOMEN!” Their father responded in a voice befitting a man who had served in the Army most of his life. Loud. Arrogant. Dominant.

As soon as Saad and Maryam entered, they saw how the dishes with the food had been broken and everything was messy. How Sarah had been sobbing in the corner. It reminded them of how things had been 10 years ago. Things had finally started to get peaceful for them, but now they wondered how things got like this. But they knew the answer to that. It all started with Maryam.

Apparently, she had been caught trying to kill herself at one point. Nobody knew what and why she was trying to do so, not even Saad. She was taken to a psychologist who managed to get her on anti-depressants which made her more anxious. Worried about what might have been the cause of this, their mother asked her head on what was bothering her. And Maryam had apathetically replied, “Why are you asking if you don’t even care?”

This had basically triggered their mother’s horrid past, and since then even though Maryam was able to recover to some extent, her mother was left to deal with her freshly opened scars. She broke her mother, but never cared to think much about it. She was the reason the family was turning upside down in the first place, but she didn’t want to realize it.

Till one day Sarah had ended up slapping her because she started talking back to her mother. “Cut the bullsh\*t already will you? Can you stop being so selfish, you good for nothing piece of trash”, she had said with her eyes filled with hatred.

It’s because of me. Tears shed from Maryam’s eyes. ‘*Yes, it is. It’s all because of you. You did this to your family. You are the one that started this fire. You should really have died already, then the world would have been a better place.’* A voice whispered in her head.

So she did something that cowards also do – run away.

Will they look for her? Or will she crumble into despair? What horrors from the past has made this family blind to the light around them?

*The butterfly flapped its wings in the distance,*

*And caused a tornado somewhere else.*

*Deadly, yet silently.*