

*By Basma Nsour, translated from the Arabic by Thoraya El-Rayyes*

It occurred to me to claw up the dirt with my fingers. To wrench him away from his death. To look for traces of myself in his lifeless features. To slap him because he died in her bed. He was with *her* when his heart suddenly stopped. She was the one who rushed to the emergency room, who the doctor patted on the shoulder as he told her: *Life is in hands of God*. She is the one who has become his widow, and I am a woman of sin who deserves to be stoned, who steals men from the warmth of their homes.

I desperately needed a word of condolence. Some kind of recognition. He'd gone to his death after leaving me at the margins until the very last moment. I had to wait until all the mourners left before my steps dragged me to the fresh grave. No one offered their condolences to me; I am the pathetic woman no one consoles.

If some miracle happened that had allowed him to spend his last night with me, would he really have died? I don't think he would have. I imagine that his heart would never have been silenced. But that isn't what happened, he passed into his fate.

Fate shouldn't be so sudden, like that. It isn't fair. Fate should be more considerate. It should give each of us enough notice and take its course after all the unfinished business has been taken care of. Yes – me – unfinished here, like this. An undeclared widow, alone and abandoned – once and for all. Not waiting for some imminent return. Without an apology that he was delayed by some emergency. Without the glow that lit up my soul for years.

I kept dreaming you would be mine. That you would come home to just me in the evenings. That you wouldn't leave me every time. That I would cook you your favourite meal, and in the mornings stroke your unshaven chin. That we would bicker about trivial things, that I would sometimes argue with your mother.

I dreamt my stomach would swell with a baby with your features. That you would cheat on me with a pathetic woman like myself, give her a few hours and rush back to me with the guilt nearly killing you. That you would buy me many presents. That we would chat meaninglessly about everything. I would pretend not to know, and relish the torture of that pathetic woman who ends up alone in the dark, ruminating over fleeting moments that don't give her anything in her long, cold nights except more loneliness.

How could I forget? I am that pathetic woman. It is me who lives at the margins of your days. Who is content with what you bestow of your excess time – the excess of your life. And you are the one who always leaves me behind – alone – jealousy eating away at my insides.

I stroke my flat stomach. Anger gnaws at my heart, and I imagine the wide bed that the two of you share, the contented nights. I would pretend to be enthusiastic when you told me – blissfully – about your little daughter's trouble making. And then you'd mention *her*. You talked about her as if she was a fact entrenched in your life. I always expected that one day, you would say horrible things about her: *stupid and boring, can't cook, ugly*.

Anything that would justify our story all those years. But you stayed silent. I waited for a long time for you to say that you were going to leave her and give me some of the spotlight. But you didn't. You allowed yourself everything. A stable marriage and children jumping around you. A love that was passionate but dark, living in blackness.

I put flowers on your grave. I wonder if you know how it feels now, to live in the dark – alone, powerless, left behind. It's alright, darling. Don't worry. I'll be back to visit you. I'll always bring flowers, and tell you about life outside that dark grave. I will share all my intimate moments with you, open up everything that is in my soul to you. Then I will leave you, again and again.

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