

Hair Fall Horror

LIYANA ESHAAL

The strands of black on my head
More valuable than gold,
They fall carelessly here and there, uncontrolled.
I stare at them with sorrow in my eyes
Scraping the fallen strands off my hair ties.
Trust me, you're not the only one struggling for a trick,
Even Prince William's bald spot shines with every click,
Proving that hairfall horror is everyone's dread,
We regret and regret all the hair that's been shed.

The writer is a student in grade 10 at Sir John Wilson School.



BAGHDAD DIARIES

FABIANA BINTE MESBAH

My eyes fling open. The lights are blinding white. *Where am I?* The pulse in my veins quickens. I can't feel my limbs, they are leaden against the bed. I struggle to tug at the tubes lining my arm; a numbing pain resides where they dig into the back of my hand. My head throbs as if it was crushed, then put together, but poorly. *What happened to me?* I want to call out for help; except my tongue is a rock trapped in my mouth and all that comes out is a muffled voice I don't recognise as my own. My heart is pounding faster now, so loud it drowns out the whirring ceiling fan. I break into a sweat. No, I'm too cold. But my entire being is burning in flames.

I can't breathe. I'm no longer on the hospital bed, the comforter tucked too tightly around me. I'm falling. I'm falling into a ceaseless pit, engulfed in darkness. I am sucked into the void as fast as I was spewed out from it.

6 MONTHS LATER

The elevator door wheezes open after a high-pitched ping and I step inside, looking at the tip of my shoes while others flood in behind me.

"Good work in Baghdad, agent," a suit-clad gentleman pats my shoulder as we begin the ascent.

I shoot him a perplexed glance and am about to say, *"You've mistaken me with someone else,"* when an older man, positioned at the back of the elevator clears his throat and begins, "Agents, thank you all for assembling at such short notice. It is a time of crisis and we need all hands on deck."

Baghdad? Agents? I jab at the "Open Doors" button as the elevator crosses my stop – the publication office on the third floor of the building. My mind goes into a frenzy of confusion and apprehension as the strangers surrounding me murmur in soft, definitive tones. I catch the older man's eyes and they glint back in understanding, empathy. He holds my gaze for a beat too long which tells me his warm eyes and thick-rimmed glasses have seen more than they let on.

Then it hits me, *he knows*. He knows why I have no memory of my life before the past spring, why all the laughing faces in my photo frames are anonymous to me. He knows what terrors induced the scars on my body – the terrors I only see glimpses of in my nightmares.

We stop at the seventh floor of the building, formerly known to me as the substandard convenience store which attracted customers once in a blue moon. The man, supposedly the head of this group, leads us towards the far end. He opens a rusting door via a retinal scanner obscured



behind an expired fire extinguisher; the assembly trails behind him with an air of discipline and conviction, evident that they are well-accustomed with the ongoing procedures and the uncertainty awaiting us.

I inch forward, taking in the rows of immaculate cubicles. Their occupants take no notice of us as they continue to type undecipherable words into monitors or dictate panicked, yet stern, instructions into headsets. We file into a conference room where, moments later, the man approaches to shake my hand. "I'm Harold Scherbatsky," he chuckles, "you used to call me Harry. It's an honour to have you here with us."

He directs my sight towards the projector screen, and I let out a baffled gasp. A picture of me is displayed – I look much younger, my eyes are gleaming with confidence and pride, my shoulders are relaxed under the crisp uniform

I am dressed in. The next images are foreign to me, and yet uncannily familiar: a dilapidated shack against a dusty backdrop with the peak of a mosque visible in the distance and the other – my body, bloody and injured, sprawled across the ground.

Then the memories come back.

My vision is foggy, my bones battered and tied to the chair. A single light bulb dangles from the ceiling, under which the men brandish their iron rods and whips. One of them comes forward. He speaks in a foreign language, chastising me, I suppose. He then brings down his baton on my head, a coup de main meant to dismantle the entire network of spies dotting eastern Baghdad.

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