

BIG BROTHER

ABHIK HASNAIN

Billy did not understand why a baby should require so much attention. Everyone, especially momma and papa, centered their focus on this newborn creature. Unlike them, he did not seem to share the excitement. He had been told for months that a baby brother was on his way. Before, it was not an issue that piqued his interest but now that he had spent two weeks at home with it, this tiny new human being was clearly an intrusion.

His parents did not love him anymore, let alone acknowledge his existence. Daily meals were eaten alone and he walked to school all by himself now. But these he considered minor privileges. He didn't have to finish his cereal and no one scolded him when he kicked stones on the road. No, what he missed were the kisses before bedtime and their Saturday afternoon visits to the park.

Everything was different now. Everything changed. And in the midst of it all was his brother. Most of the time momma and poppa adored its beauty and disguised innocence. But Billy saw him for who he truly was. And more than anything he wished that this baby had never been born. All he wanted was to be able to do something that'd make it all go away.

But 7 year-olds aren't supposed to be murderers and the world definitely doesn't work that way. So instead of a bloodthirsty Billy looking for revenge, our story presents us with a different approach. A peaceful one.

Underneath all the existential despair that he felt, were momentary smiles reserved for "it". Billy felt disgusted with him but during the eventual accidental looks at the baby, the smile would form all by itself. He couldn't help it. The baby, his brother, no matter how gruesome of a creature with an ulterior motive, was beautiful. The sight of its small hands trying to grasp everything and, the meaningless sounds it would throw at an admirer, was all the innocence in the world brought together.

It was in these moments that Billy would rethink his feelings towards the newcomer in the family. Can't he live with it? Did he really have to go? But then momma or poppa would enter the room and scold him for not letting the baby sleep and put their focus once again on telling each other how the baby was the best thing that happened to them. That ruined it all. The hatred came back involuntarily and he felt a natural repulsion towards the one who was trying to take his place.

And then Billy's 7-year-old mind came up with an idea all by itself. What if he gave the baby to the tooth fairy? That would be a good idea, right? The fairies will take care of him and his parents would be happy. They'll go back to loving him again and life will return to its sweetest form. He remembered how he had put his tooth under his pillow when it came loose one day. And in the morning, he had eagerly looked underneath and there waiting in its full glory, was a penny.

That night after supper, when his parents had gone to bed, he went to the baby's room. Peering down on that tiny face he decided that it was the most wonderful thing he had ever seen. Careful not to wake it up, he placed the pillow on the baby's face.

DAWN

ADIB ADNAN

There was once a town; far away from anywhere else. A small town populated by quiet people, who kept to themselves, content in living the way that their fathers had, and their fathers before. They never thought to leave, or to try their luck elsewhere.

All except for one. They called him by many names, but most just called him a madman. He was a decrepit little thing, thin, wrinkled, with dark, sunburnt skin and white hair caked in mud, and bruises all over. His hollow eyes set deep into his skull, such that at times all you could see of his eyes were the whites. He slept in the street, even though he had a wife and home to go back to, and would dress in rags that he never washed. He would not stay quiet, and he hated the path of his father. He would stand in the town market, and would cry out till the end of night, "Leave, leave this path, so that calamity may not befall you." The children would pelt him with stones and rocks, bruising him all over, and when they grew older and had children of their own they would reply, "Woe to you, madman. Do you want us to leave the path of our fathers? Stop your talk and leave us in peace."

But the old man would not stop, he would return every day, when the town would open their shops, when the sun was risen and casting dark shadows over their heads, and would cry out to all who could hear him, "Leave, leave, so may calamity not befall you." He would return every day, in dust or rain, in heat or cold, and would cry, "Leave, leave."

And so it was for many years, until one day the townspeople woke up at dawn and found the old man running through the streets proclaiming, "Despair, despair. The race of man is not immortal." And the townspeople replied, "Woe to you, old man. Why

are you awakening us from our peaceful slumber?"

And so they woke up for the month that followed, the old man's proclamation ringing in their ears. Until one day they woke up not at dawn, but far into the morning, when the sun was casting dark shadows over their heads, to find that the old man was nowhere to be found. They asked his wife where he was, but she could say nothing and had not seen him in her house for years. The village elders laughed and said, "Finally he has left us. Let this be a day of celebration." And so the children danced in the street, and music and laughter could be heard well into the night.

Until suddenly, it stopped, and the only thing that could be heard was the sound of steel cutting flesh, and the tearful cries of women and children, and cries of woe and despair.

And when the sun rose that morning, on that red dawn, it rose on a changed landscape. The town was unrecognizable, blood painting the walls and the streets, and the children lying on the ground sobbing in solitude, their eyes closed and shut behind crimsoned palms, avoiding the dead stares of their fathers and the elders.

With time, the children stopped crying, and began to walk. They walked into the deserted plains before them and strived to get us far away from the town as they could, as far away from the beasts of the night before. At night they would lie in the sand, and thought they heard a slow, quiet, hoarse voice saying, "Rejoice, rejoice. The race of man has left."

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