



# COUNT DOWN

FARIHA SULTANA

Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three, he counted as the dirty water dripped into the sink opposite his bunk bed. All the water supplies in this facility were damaged, rotten and the water itself sported floating impurities, not that anyone cared enough to fix it. His life was of no value anyways. Day after day, he rotted in the dump that was now his "home." He drank the impure water that was now dripping into the sink with a slow rhythm that drove his mind to well beyond crazy. He ate the tasteless food that was given to him by the men with guns outside his door. Men with guns who did not even know how to shoot a possible target without missing at least thrice or even more. Pity the guns weren't in his hand right now. He craved the feel of cool metal under his rough hands; hands that have seen better days before they were turned into weapons. He craved the feel of a loaded assault rifle resting in the crook of elbow as he took out enemies. He craved freedom.

"Is that the boy?"

"Yes. Just like his father isn't he? Like they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Just hope he gets death. People like him destroy this city just by existing."

But they were wrong. He wasn't like his father. His father was an animal, taking pleasure in draining the life out of innocent people who didn't see it coming. He was different. Better. At least that was what he told himself in order to be able to sleep at night. Not that sleeping was peaceful anymore either. Nightmares haunted his thoughts even as he endeavoured to rest his mind after a painful day inside the box. But he would get out. He would escape into wilderness again. That was his promise to her. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever laid his eyes on. His life changed the day she entered his life, wearing a red dress that caught the eyes of everyone in

the ballroom. She looked gorgeous as she sashayed up to him and demanded to know his name. Yes, demanded. He remembered that day better than any other. His life began when she took over his entire existence and he had to fulfil his promise, to her. He promised her he would go back. He promised her he would shower her with happiness the day they got married. He promised her he would shelter her from the big bad world that consumed them every day. He wasn't going to break that promise anytime soon. She lived for him, and he for her. Their lives were entwined as if their souls were tied together with a thick black rope. A rope devoid of breaking, a connection that had the power to conquer the world. Which is exactly what they set out to do - they had planned to conquer the world. That was before things went out of hand and the corrupt system that promised false justice, ruined his life. Ruined everything he lived for, trampled on his dreams, and crushed his hopes. However, he could forgive them, for everything they ruined for him. The one thing he could not forgive was the way they treated her. They treated her like a murderer's wife, but he was not a murderer. He did not kill in cold blood, and most importantly he was not his father.

He had killed some people but in his mind, they deserved it. From his point of view, he was only killing bad people who ruined innocent lives.

His father was the one who taught him to shoot as precisely as a professional sniper. His father trained him to be the man he was now. However, he was not his father. He repeated this same thing over and over to himself, hoping it would change what he was. Did he hate who he was? Never. Did he doubt what he was trying to do? Never...maybe. Or not.

At the end of the day, all that matters is how you perceive yourself. He perceived his actions as true intentions. He believed in what he did

and convinced himself that he was doing the right thing for the world, and for his wife. He believed he was nothing like his father. He taught himself to think that he wasn't a villain like his father, but a hero. He did not believe in what others judged him by, and he didn't even let it affect him. All he tried to do was make his city a better place for everyone. He didn't expect anyone to understand his intentions, his dreams. But she did. She understood when everyone opposed him. When everyone wanted to bring him down, she stood beside him, planning the next mission. She was the only light that burned in his life.

He thought back to the nights when he sat beside her, bathed in candlelight, as she mapped out the next mission on paper. Her eyebrows furrowed in deep thought, her nose wrinkled up as she tried to think deeply. He thought back to the countless nights, as he watched her support him in his beliefs. He was a strong man, driven by ambition, but he wouldn't be anything if she wasn't there. She was his lifeline and he would go back to her. Not today, but someday.

"Inmate 58901," he heard the policeman call out. It was time for him to leave, to meet her. This is what he thrived through his days for. Meetings that he was allowed once every two months. He would now behold what he loved for the last time, through an annoying glass pane that separated them. Because, the next time he met her, he would be free.

The escape plan was perfect and it was his. He turned excited as he thought of holding his beloved, freely, when he left. A smile broke out on his lips, despite the adrenaline that spiked through his veins when he thought of escaping.

He counted down for the very last time. Ninety-eight. Ninety-nine. Hundred.

*The writer is a student of class IX at Sunnydale School.*