



Him

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"I was trapped in a room, with no escape. No exit. It had a pale yellow essence to it, like it had been plagued from jaundice. The walls had sickening lines scratched horizontally as if an animal had scraped hard with its nails out of anguish, producing an unnerving screech that erected the hair on your back. I looked around, and my stomach churned.

What is this place?

There was a cassette player placed in the middle of the cabin, playing an indescribable note that sounded vaguely like the tortured pleading of pigs. It played over and over again. I got up, searched frantically for a way out. No door. No window. The recorder won't stop. I began pulling at my hair."

The dream was recurrent.

Her once beautiful and luxuriant hair was tied up in a small knot with a few broken ends sprouting out stubbornly, resembling a scrunched up ball of twigs. She stared into the mirror and sighed despairingly at her worn-out self as she admired that pendant of ruby around her loose and wrinkled neck that complimented her incandescent eyes of limestone. Those eyes were apprehensive of meeting her withered self again. They spoke of an archaic beauty, which was a macabre sight at present. Her eyeballs were almost protruding out due to her emaciated face shrunken to the size of a petit man's fist. With what little amount of poise and grace she could conjure, Helena walked near to the large, gothic arched window and looked out as the last spectrum of rays diffused into the arriving grey that announced the premonition of another melancholia soaked evening.

Helena trudged out of her room and stared at the opposite end of the hallway. The door was shut. The man who lived behind it was a stranger. Her husband. Wistfully, she slowly walked to it, stood there for a moment and was almost about to knock when she thought better of it and withdrew her hand.

She walked back to her room thinking about last night. He had been at her door, or so she believed. Their laughter of a distant summer rang in her ears like a far-away memory, echoing through time.

They had fallen in love. Succumbed to its addiction. She had run away from home because everyone she called her own was fiercely against them together.

Fourteen days they had been in an intoxicated realm, giving in to sensations that were raw and organic, absorbing each other and basking in each other's overwhelming love. And then they found out. The rough hands had dragged her back from the clutch of his arms, while she screamed, kicked at them, shouting till the veins in her neck turned green and her voice surrendered and he became a blurred vision as her eyes swelled up with tears and then he was gone. Just like that.

Not long after, she was brought back to this abode, he came to stay with her, miraculously. But things had changed. Everything had descended into shabbiness. Their glorified love was reduced to mere mocking memories. Maybe he felt humiliated and found her repulsive.

He became distant, reserved, and eventually an alien in her world. Helena had refused to see her folks after this brutality they bestowed upon her. She remained alone in this room of hers, aloof from the rest of civilization and submerged herself in painting and wishing for his affection. Days then stretched to years and then one day she found her first grey hair.

Helena smiled girlishly to herself as she returned to her room now, feeling his presence in the air and settled down to put bold strokes of colors onto a new canvas.

I watched her from afar. Through the glass window, occupied and engrossed in ludicrous affairs. This woman had a strange impact on me, sending ripples of dread and peace in my veins. She was stuck in these rusted wheels of life that moved gratingly but still maintained her achingly beautiful aura. I sometimes heard her sing at night that reminded one of ancient, lonely voices that cried for release.

"You don't think she'll mind me going in there," exclaimed the new maiden, Margo, interrupting my contemplation, "I heard she has episodes of rage and acts aggressive?" she concluded, looking at me for reassurance.

I could tell her muscles were tensed. "Don't worry, today is one of her good days. Come."

The amateur followed me to Helena's room and the moment she saw us entering, she beamed with a radiant luster. She got up and embraced me tenderly. "I have been expecting you, and oh, who is this little bird?" she asked, restless and curious. Not waiting for an answer,

she uttered almost impatiently, "He was here last night! I saw his shadow lingering at my door," as her eyes danced with euphoria and waited for confirmation.

Sobs of pity rose in my chest as I bit off my urgency to scream at her, "Of course, love. Alfred is soon going to come to his loving missus, you'll see."

I turned to the new nurse and introduced her, "Oh and Helena, she will be at your service for some time, I am off to my town for a few days."

Following our little unceremonious session of formality, I got out of her room and instructed Margo to handle her delicately. "Why does no one tell her?" she asked.

"What? That her husband doesn't exist? That he is only a figment of her imagination, that she got married to a phantom? Well, we tried. And believe me; you do not want to be at her proximity then." I flashed back to the time she had wounded one of the nurses and had turned to a ravaging being. She had looked beautiful even then.

"No, we decided to let her linger in her world and be content."

Again she enquired, "will she ever recover? Is there hope?" Refusing to believe her fate.

"Her chances look bleak." I sighed.

I stared at her again, as she looked into the mirror again and examined that chain of shackle around her neck, as if she was appreciating a neckpiece. It rattled with a metallic clink and I knew she could see her favorite ruby set instead. She was standing in a yellowing room where her imagination had engulfed the disgusting reality. The only time the harsh truth caught up with her, she scraped her nails against the walls until they bled and tore her hair mercilessly.

Helena walked up to the gothic window again and looked out. From the outside, you could see a woman in a hospital gown peering through a teasingly small grilled window of a looming mental facility. Inside, she was in a majestic atmosphere, lost in thought, when Alfred knocked.

And the Heavens laughed.

Iqra suffers from wanderlust and zones out most of the time. She hopes to see the Loch Ness monster someday and in the mean time complains about Economics. Reach out to her at iqrالاقا@gmail.com or www.facebook.com/iqra.l.qamari