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The  
*Secret*  
*Faces*  
of *her*

*by*

Hanadi A.Lüthi



*{ The night before the feast }*

In the dark he watched closely the fragile crescent as it disappeared behind the far mountain. It is the night of every year when he had always to wait for a knock on his door to arrive, the time he got lost in deep thoughts which he tried to resist for very long. The knock has arrived and he slightly raised his head with a fainted smile awaiting to hear the second knock and then the third. He took couple of minutes giving the one at the door the chance to leave before he opens it to get the basket which had witnessed the beginning of his story and been kept to remind him with it for years.

In this basket he used to receive an elegant handmade garment tailored especially for him, every tribe in his island shared making a part of it. Some provided the finest cloth while others brought their self made threads dyed with gold and there were others who contrived buttons from precious stones. At the end, they all gathered to create this piece of art for him to wear at what is supposed to be his birthday. This garment was a present to show appreciation and love, it was how the people of the island expressed their gratefulness for

having him and this gift had to be delivered always the night before the feast. Every year he would open the door, collect the garment and leaves the basket outside and it would be taken away before the break of dawn to be nicely stowed for the custom to repeat itself the following year. However, an important thing must be mentioned here, the birthday they celebrate was not the day he was born but the day he was found on their land and this basket is what he was left in. That evening he didn't just take the garment as he used to but took the basket along with it. He felt the urge to have it close to his heart and as long as possible before his sight. He hoped it could speak to him, to tell why he got abandoned this way, he hoped that it could answer all the questions that tortured him for the most of his life, the life he struggled to understand what is it all about. Carefully he placed the garment on his bed admiring every detail in it, usually he would smile but this time tears were locked in his eyes as he gazed at the basket for very long. How could he still remember that day so clear as if it just happened yesterday, how could he precisely recall every single feeling he went through when he was only couple of weeks born. He took a deep breath trying to swallow the pain no one knew of except him.

He remembers that night very well no matter how hard he tried to pretend that he has forgotten about it, earlier that day his mother took him in her arms and they moved travelling for quite long time until they arrived to a place where the wind was pleasant and the sun spread kind warmth but gradually he started to hear noises and voices all around that bothered his delicate ears and disturbed his peaceful sleep. The day of the market is the day of the feast when many would meet to buy and sell or even exchange their goods in between. A large celebration is always held with lots of food and several

delicious smelling drinks but neither the market nor the feast at that point meant anything to him as what mattered the most is that he still felt his mother arms around him. He wiped another silent tear as he recalled the last moments he spent close to his mother's heart and how he woke up to see no sun, no mother, no father and no one. The place which was filled with life had suddenly turned into a dull scary night. He was left wrapped in a piece of harsh cloth scratching on his soft skin whenever he tried to move crying for help. He felt that chill in his spine just like it hit him laying in that basket on the wet cold ground. Sharp air found its way through his vulnerable bones as if the soil was breathing the fearful unknown into every bit of his fragile soul. He could see nothing except the dark skies above and he burst a little cry believing surely his mother will come but she never did leaving him alone for the discomfort and helplessness to deal with.

As the fright crawled rapidly into his little innocent life, something happened that made him stop to feel, to think and to cry as if to disrupt him from the cruelty he found himself having to face. A bright spark in the sky grabbed his attention and before he grasped his breath in amazement, another spark brighter than the first followed leaving traces of an intense glow before vanishing as if they never existed. The scenery repeated itself distracting his pain and hunger soothing the fear that filled him, it was like a magic show which has been performed especially for him. The repentance of this spectacular amusement hypnotised his eyes making them fall heavy and dragged him into deep sleep fast forwarding the time, as if to help him to escape a reality that he hated from the deepest part of his heart.



A loud gasp forced his eyes to open and the panic scream he heard made him scream fearfully in return. And old lady stuck her face close to his and the look on her face said that she was as shocked and scared as he was. She stood up and took few steps back still staring at him then looked helplessly on her both sides before she came close again murmuring in despair. He cried louder to let her know how he suffered from hunger and thirst but it seemed that she was not sure yet of what she would do with him. In fact, he lost counts of the times she went back and forth checking him like she refused to believe what her eyes saw as she struggled to accept his presence. The way she acted made him start to doubt that she was lost needing help herself more than he did. Finally she held up the basket and gave him a quick kiss on his forehead, rushing with her steps still talking loud to herself. The sun beams broke faintly in the skies reaching out to his tearful eyes, it was gentle unlike the life he was given to taste gruesome fear and the bitterness of neglect. Shortly after they arrived to this old lady's home she took him out of the basket and held him close, her tears wetted his face as she tried hard to show him a smile. Soon he was resting in her lap while with one hand she caressed him and with the other she milked a goat. He sucked all what she gave, once, twice till the last drop and he felt satisfied and full. He started to let go in her arms hearing her heart beats calmed the fear of the dreadful previous night. Sleep started slowly to win over him while the old lady softly sang as she rubbed his little feet washing him gently in warm water and he felt as if he returned safe to his mother's womb. He peacefully smiled at her hoping her tears would stop. He enjoyed getting wrapped in fresh linen pleasantly smelling and way softer than before. He decided to surrender to sleep and to let be whatever will be, he had no other choice. But opposite to his desire, the old lady

held him up close and took the basket in her other hand. At this second the sleep was gone as he feared that she will place him back in that basket again. Luckily she did not and he was relieved but not as much, for in no time, they were out of the house and back to the streets with her shouting loud calling for everyone to gather walking in speedy steps heading to a place at a high point where she finally stopped. Later he learned that this place is where the people of the island meet to celebrate special events and it is also the spot where declarations and announcements are always made and they were of every kind, marriage or divorce, rules and laws, the news of death or the arrival of a new born and surely the warnings of natural disasters which have to be prepared for.

The day after the market has been always assigned to rest and any kind of activity was prohibited. Therefore, the old lady had to shout her lungs out to wake up the sleeping and grab the attention of as many as possible. She coughed badly as she climbed to that high spot and he could hear voices starting to rise. Questioning and panic filled the air replacing the tranquil silence but people of the island must gather because the old lady will never break the rules calling for something that was not serious enough. By the time she arrived to the high top, hundreds waited impatiently guessing of what might have occurred expecting the worst . She raised the hand that carried the basket and in a blink all the noise started gradually to subside.

“What is going on?” One raised his voice.

“What is that under her shawl?” A lady longed her neck wondering.

The old lady took away her scarf revealing the infant in her arms and sighs waved in the crowd, contagious wonderings and endless questions were raining from every direction. She

had to raise her voice even more gesturing with her hand for order and silence before she spoke.

"Who knows the parents of this child?" She turned slowly from side to side showing them the baby boy and the basket she found him in. The question marks on the faces told the answer without a word.

"What do you mean?..." A woman asked confused, "You think that someone lost their child!" She screamed tapping her chest.

"I am sure this child does not belong to us, he is not from our island". A man shouted from the back.

"Could he be the son of one of the merchants from the market yesterday" Another said.

"I also thought so..." A lady in the crowd agreed while many shook their heads in disbelief.

"They all left..." A young woman shouted, "What a misery! We don't even know where they come from"

"There are few who repeatedly come to the market every year and I am certain that this child does not belong to any of them". Another added worrying everyone even more.

"The majority of the merchants change every feast, what if his parents would not return to take him" A lady commented.

"How can someone forget their child!"

"Forget their child..." someone angrily exclaimed, "This baby was left here deliberately".

"How could anyone do that to their own flesh and blood" An older lady cursed this cruel act.

"Nothing like that has ever happened on our island before, neither our ancestors have ever told of encountering such a thing" A leader of one tribe denounced.

"What I gathered you all here for..." The old lady interrupted the crowd loud and firm, "You all know me well, you know my

parents and my grandparents and how we spent our lives serving our island for the sake of love and good life for everyone” She paused taking a deep breath before she continued to say, “I hope you all remember that I kept my oath to protect you, to judge with fairness and to give without asking for anything in return”.

“We all know what you have done and still do for our land and for all of us...” The leader of another tribe said and many nodded in agreement with him, “We cannot pay you back no matter how long we lived”.

“I am old now and I won’t be living as much as I lived. I have been thinking about the right time to announce my will and I believe there is no better time to do this as now” She said with a smile glancing at the abandoned infant in her arms while the people of the island lowered their sight looking at the ground, the thought of her leaving them one day had torn and worried many hearts.

“I have never been blessed with a child and today I consider finding this infant as a precious reward, I declare him as my adopted son” She said hearing the gasps fill the crowd but this didn’t stop her from continuing to say what her heart ordered and what her mind felt as right. “I will take care of this child for the little rest of my life but I ask you all to share raising him up with me”. People of the island looked at one another in question and doubt but she didn’t leave them to wonder for long.

“I want my child to enter every home of every tribe, I want him to know each one of you and your children well. I ask you to teach him our different tongues, to show him our traditions which we grew to embrace. Tell him about our history, philosophies and about life, show him the different ways we reach out to God. Teach him the crafts we master and tell him

the stories we inherited from our ancestors but above all that there is one important thing that you all must give your oath on... you must provide him love and the freedom of choice".

"What if he is a child of sin?" A religious leader of one tribe shouted, "Who knows what this might bring into our island and our lives!"

"The real sin is to turn our backs on him and I guarantee you that a punishment would fall upon those who think of him in this shameful way" A woman in the crowd screamed at this ill intent.

"What if his parents suddenly returned?" Someone curiously asked.

"I would never trust to give them back the child. This is insane and what they made is unacceptable in every way" One man replied to this heated arguments.

"We don't know his parents or what happened to them, we can't assume the circumstances that might have driven them to do this, therefore, no one here has the right to judge" The old lady replied with a fainted smile.

"I have gathered you here not to discuss of the what might have been or the reason behind, I called you to take a promise and to have your word... I want you to give my adopted son the love he needs, the knowledge he seeks and the freedom of choice" Her firm words were more of an order than a request.

The silence that shadowed everyone was a good sign, they were listening, thinking and taking the matter to the heart.

"We have been always an example of generosity and kindness and on behalf of my tribe I announce our agreement to take part of raising this child and we will consider him as our son" The leader of the fifth tribe said as he turned gesturing with his hand to his people who applauded loud in acceptance and support.

“We never wish for others what we don’t wish for ourselves and taking care of this child is a duty not a choice. We consider this little boy now as one of us” The leader of the sixth tribe said as the crowd sheered all around.

“Every human has the right to have a respectful life. You have found him and God has saved him by your hands, now is our turn and this is a test for us. Are we going to fail it?” The leader of the seventh tribe asked aloud and many declared taking the responsibility with conscious and love.

“So it will be. Love, knowledge and the freedom of choice for our son”. The leader of the last tribe cheered and everyone hurried towards the wise old woman taking a look at the infant who has been fast asleep by then.

The singing of early morning birds brought him back to the present again, he has been travelling in the past for the entire night. He glanced at the basket and sadly smiled, he knew he must find the answers for all the questions he has been pushing away from his mind. The stone basin was already filled with cold water and fresh lemon peel that was left overnight to be enjoyed for a quick wash before he puts his birthday garment on. Small perfume jars were ready too, he took few drops of amber in his balm and rubbed them together and ran his fingers through his dark curls but the essence of sandalwood mixed with black musk and cotton oil was always left to be carefully sprinkled over his garment and his neck. He didn’t check himself in the mirror like he always did before leaving from the door, this time he didn’t dare to look at the man reflecting starring directly into his eyes, demanding, asking, insisting to know... Until when he will keep pretending that he doesn’t know?



***For the sake of what,  
For the sake of who?***

He left home and started to walk down the market aisles, greetings and compliments showered him from everyone. He would nod with a smile thanking them warmly for their wonderful gift. He proceeded reaching to his favourite part of the market where perfumes and essences were sold as well as unique books brought from all over the world, the world he knew nothing of.

He was loved and respected by all the people of his island, from the youngest to the very old. They kept their oath as they promised his mother, the wise old lady who adopted him and was their beloved leader. For thirty-five years he grew to earn his people's trust and they admired him as the years passed, it was a great honour and surprise when they have chosen him to be the judge of judges who makes the final decisions and says the last word. He was nearly seventeen at that time. They called him also the master of art as he perfected almost all handicrafts with an astonishing precision and remarkable taste. The wide knowledge he sustained from reading since he was a little child made him the greatest reference for teaching countless topics satisfying wide range of interests. Sincerely he

loved his people as he was also deeply close to their hearts, he was a part of them all and they all lived in him. But, there was that one thing that he lost sleep over for years, a strong sense he no longer could live with and scared him day after day. The people of the island were living in peace... fake peace.

It was just a matter of time before one of the island's tribes would thrive for the highest control and to have the upper hand. He saw that coming all the time and the feeling of it would hit him in situations he witnessed throughout the years. His people lived now in peace because there was no other choice, they needed one another for goods, sources of living and protection from the outside world. However, if this need would no longer exist, there will be a disaster that surely will fall upon his island and all the people he dearly loves. How could he face them with what he feels when each one of them will certainly deny out of deceive or fear? He tried hard for many years to interpret some warning signs, he hinted hiddingly his worries in gatherings and feasts and he spoke of them as if they were stories made up by his creative mind. And sometimes he would tell about his secret fears in words of wisdom in his poems.

He continued to walk through the market and kept greeting many in return, he did it unconsciously as his thoughts were somewhere far digging in a possible scary reality that no one would want to admit. Towards the sunset at the end of the market day he will have to give a speech, when the merchants leave and the people of the island gather afterwards as they are used and wanted always from him. It is a tradition since the ancestors' times, and his mother, the wise old lady has profoundly maintained the continuation of it. The day of the feast was chosen for this event as it is the only time all tribes

would gather for one full day. Usually his speech would be words of gratefulness or prayers for the good and protection, there were stories of laughter and joy too and many times his people insisted to hear him playing his flute as they adored the melodies he composed. But this time, what is he supposed to do? Shall he just face them plainly with his worries and his thoughts? Shall he let out the whispers of the battle of his mind or should he just be silent and keep on pretending convincing himself that nothing of what he feels or fears actually true. Perhaps he is way too concerned and his mind makes matters greater than they are. The only thing he was certain about is that he swears by heart to do anything to keep his island and beloved people safe, but what happens when he dies. No one knows when this moment would arrive and death does not know age or race, it does not differentiate upon hierarchy states, everyone tastes it alike. No, he must speak up as neglection is neither wise nor just.

He walked down the market' aisles thinking harder than any other time he did in his entire life.

"I must speak up" He shouted at himself.

"Don't..." His mind warned, "You will pay the attention that something is wrong. You will make them doubt one another earlier than you wish and accusations will spread with hatred and perhaps violence. If you do, what you are afraid to happen will happen much faster than you thought... Don't talk".

"For the sake of what and for the sake of who you want to remain silent and how long you feel you could?..." His heart blamed, "These people have given you their love and trust and they have put their lives in your hands. Are you letting go of your mother's footsteps? Are you abandoning the hopes and dreams of her and of everyone? ... You are the only one who

can do this, you must speak up”

Voices kept fighting in his mind, suffering to decide for the right to be done. There must be a way, he repeated silently to himself to ease this unbearable pain. He knew well if he didn't act the guilt will slowly kill him, gambling with the most precious things in his life and putting the efforts of his ancestors under the dust is something he wouldn't dare to think. Postponing the matter for another year will end up with him going through the same fear and pain over and over again. His head turned and sudden weakness took over him, it was not the exhaustion or the lack of sleep but the battle he went through which was much louder, more scarier than any other time.

“Are you fine?” A young man worriedly asked when he saw him leaning on a wall lowering his head and covering his face with his hand.

“You look so pale...” The attention of another was grabbed, “I will go get you something to drink” He hurried to offer as he checked him close.

“Soon the sun is down and we can't wait to enjoy what you have prepared for us tonight” A lady said walking by not realising the state he was in.

“The speech” he repeated in his mind many times. The young man returned with fresh cool water in a clay cup, he thanked him and took a sip then dropped himself sitting on the ground. “There must be a way, there must be a key. Something that I can gain their attention and support with” He kept encouraging himself to think.



Memories of his childhood rushed projecting before his eyes in search for one common thing that all his people shared over the time and he remembered the most strangest thing. The stories that he always heard since he was a child, one of them is repeated in every house of every tribe. The tales which were told to the day of a legend or so they said, however, they all believed that the stories about her hold a truth in them.

The tales are about a woman who has the answer to everything and she knows much more than anyone could dare to wish. Even when his people argued about her identity itself, they still talked about her in several ways and every tribe described her mysterious being with different traits. Some said that she had lived at an ancient time while some believed that she never dies. Some said that she is a goddess of wisdom and justice for the mankind while others thought of her as a dangerous witch or an entity which causes harm. Many agreed that she knows the secrets of hearts and minds while others considered her as the work of imagination of a highly talented story teller or a poet. Some people described her as sun kissed with transcended brown eyes and some said that she had an alabaster skin with magnetising dark blue eyes. Many pictured her as an angel who was always there to help but also many thought she was the deception of evil itself. Whoever denied her existence referred to logic avoiding unnecessary arguments and the ones who admitted it consistently pointed that there were, are and always will be somethings in this world which are beyond the human comprehension. But the interesting thing is, she has been always talked about and she had a strong presence in their hearts and minds whether she was believed to be real or not. One more thing his people have repeatedly argued about, whoever had the sincere wish to meet with her, his wish will be eventually granted.