

The Greasy Haired Woman



Zenab Suhail Afridi
*Research Scholar, English,
 Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.*

“**M**ay I come and live with your family?” she said, lightheartedly. My mother looked at her with amazement and grinned at her innocent question. We live in a big house with a dozen family members, on the upper floor live our tenants, a woman lives there with her husband and three adult sons.

During the winter, we spend most of our time on the terrace in the sunlight. We go to the terrace when the muazzin says the afternoon azaan and return when the evening azaan is heard. I take all my books and study material, and my mother takes all her knitting material along with some eatables.

She moved through the world carrying her silence like oil in her hair—unnoticed, unasked about, yet impossible to wash away.

The warmth of the sun in winter gives the pleasure like rain in summer. Winter always remains the most cherished time of the year for me and there are many reasons for the same. The first is the morning sunshine, which I love the most, the other is the smell of hot coffee, which pulls me towards it. Warm blankets and a messy bed are another attraction.

A few days back, when my mother and I went to the terrace, we saw the woman (our tenant) putting the clothes on the string to get dry. My mother went to talk to her. At first, she hesitated, but later joined the conversation.

The diffident woman is in her fifties, her grey hairs tied in a messy bun, her kurti stained with patches of oil and drops of water falling from her shalwar as she has washed the clothes, a bindi on her forehead and bangles in her hands which do not match her dress. Our tenant talked with us about her mother, who is no more, and also told us about the love and care her mother showered on her. The woman told us that she is the eldest of her four siblings, and her mother used to love her the most, being the most innocent child of her parents. While telling her all this the lady began to sob.

When a girl marries, she leaves everything behind; her family, her friends, her old world for someone she does not even know properly. A woman marries hoping for a better tomorrow, but for some, the dreams remain dreams. They never get the love and care they longed for.



"Mummy... mummy," a manly voice called out when the woman was telling us about her mother, wiping her tears, she stood up from the ground and told us that she had to go as her son is here and food has to be served to him. Before going, she requested that my mother to come tomorrow as well, and my mother promised her. That was too strange for me. Why did she ask my mother to come again tomorrow?

In her presence, desire was never spoken; it lingered instead in gestures, glances, and the weight of what society refused to name.

"Your suit is very nice," she said.

"Thank you," I said smiling.

"How much does it cost?" She asked

"Fifteen hundred," I replied .

"Fifteen hundred for this suit only?" She asked, surprised. "Yes nowadays simple suits cost this much only," I said casually.

"I have not been to market for 4-5 years", she told us.

I looked at my mother with surprise. My mother being a wise and kind The lady asked her if she wanted to come to the market with us tomorrow. She said no and told us that her younger sister, who is well-off, sends clothes and other necessary items for her. The other day mother carried some eatables and fruits for her. Mother is now her all-time favourite, because she understands her and that's all a woman wants. A woman always needs someone who can understand her emotions and feelings even before she expresses them.

The woman who is now my mother's friend and my aunt is a lonely person though she has three sons. Daily she asks my mother to come again tomorrow. Whenever she says this, certain questions surround me.

Why is she attached to strangers too much? Loneliness is a terrible poverty; human beings are social animals who cannot live alone. Daily my mother spends time with aunty and tries to end her loneliness. Their friendship is beyond religion; one never asks about religion before making friends.

Our meetings continued, and in every meeting, the aunt talks about her past life and her life before marriage. She often says, "Those were the golden days of my life, no work, no responsibilities, no commitment." The thing I noticed most in her daily conversation was the pain behind her words. She never mentions anything about her husband. This thing keeps questioning me. Why does she never talk about her husband? How can a person not talk about the most important person in her life?

One day, when I was sitting in my room and studying till late at night, I heard some noise. I went closer to where the noise was heard. I heard Aunty crying and pleading "No... no. Please... no." From her voice and crying I could make out that her husband is drunk and is beating her. Even her sons were not defending their father. Why? How can 3 adult son watch their mother being assaulted by someone and not defend?

I don't know why but I ignored everything and went to bed. That day, I got answers to my previous questions. She became attached to strangers as she does not have anyone who can be called her own. She never mentions her husband because he is not a person who can be talked about.

The next day, we again went to the terrace, and as usual, she was waiting for us. Her smile was no different, and one could never tell from her face what had happened last night. That day she said, laughing, "May I come and live with your family?" We took her words casually with smiling faces.

My examinations were going on and I didn't sleep till late at night, that day also I heard Aunty sobbing as her husband was beating her. I felt bad for her and wanted to change it, but I was helpless. After that multiple questions surrounded me. What is the use of my education when I'm unable to help a woman in need? Feminism seems nothing to me now, this woman does not even know the meaning of feminism, and I, despite knowing my duty at this point, am not helping her.

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This became a regular activity, every day her husband came drunk, shouted at her and beat her. Everyone in my family was now aware of what was going on in our house. One day, I personally discussed about Aunty with my younger brother, who was just eighteen years old.

“Aunty is very innocent since her childhood, but she is not insane,” I told my brother.

“Yes, but now she is moving towards insanity because she is all alone,” My brother said.

“No, we will not let that happen,” I said confidently.

Further, we discussed that she needs to develop some confidence, and she has to learn to defend herself as her husband never cares for her. Even her sons, whom she loves so much, do not show their affection towards her. A mother’s love is unconditional she never wants anything in return. She just showers her love on her children, even though they do not love her back. She is a sweet lady and surely she will lead a happy and independent life.

She was not remembered for what she did, but for what she endured—embodying a life where neglect itself became a form of intimacy.

On the same day, we again heard the noise, and to my surprise, my brother straightaway went to the upper floor where the tenants live. He hit the door of their room and shouted, “Stop this, stop ... We will not tolerate this in our house” he paused, and there was complete silence from the other end. He continued “Learn to respect a woman, all day from morning till night she works for you and waits for you to come home so that she can spend some time with you, and you... you assault her as if it is a part of your daily routine. Shame on you... but we will not tolerate this.” There was pin-drop silence from the other side. I was shocked to hear my younger brother speaking all that. This is what education teaches us, and yes, education is the most powerful weapon with which we can change the world. I even got the answer to my previous question that her sons were not helping her because they had seen their mother being assaulted by their father all their lives, and they could not help.

That day, I also realised the importance of the upbringing of a child. I was proud of my brother who fulfilled his duty as an educated student. We often witness wrongdoers around us, and we ignore them, but if we are educated, it is our duty to raise our voice against the injustices around us.



The next day, when we met Aunty, she was wearing a yellow saree with matching bangles and a bindi of the same colour on her forehead and her open hair was clean and smelling faintly of the shampoo. She was beaming, though she didn’t mention anything, but I could observe her face, confident and sparkling in the bright yellow sunlight.

From that day onwards, we never heard any noise in our house, but the tenants soon left our house of their own accord. Now, I always wish that she would be happy and content wherever she is living but also worry about her well-being because she still lives with the same abusive people.

The end.