

Violent Delights

by Shoaib Rashdi

For Mildred

Therapy

I hate everyone is scrawled on the creamy white wall in blood-red lettering. I stand inside the therapist's waiting room, wallowing in the surge of hateful terror that arose in my stomach a while ago; when I'd been good for nothing. When no one seemed to be batting an eye, whether I live or die. *Oh, what good amid these indifferent humans, these morons, is my existence? Where lies my destiny, I ask, but find no answer. This quiet world, the unheard humming of silent stars, and the indifference of the cosmic vastness that dwarfs my existence. What have I to speak and mumble here? If death is to come, let it come early. Let me bring it upon myself! My imagination tortures me. It consoles me; it brings forth scenes of a distant and painful fantasy—the walks with the beloved in dewy meadows hand in hand, and what have you... What am I to do?*

Breathing heavily, I stand before the door, measuring my options, as I become conscious of my hair soaked in sweat. My heart aches, as my subconscious mind pleads for help. *Oh, where are*

you right now, you star of mine? Where can I find you? Tell me. I need you. The possibility of you not existing is unbearable. Come! Meet me now! Don't you see? I need you. Are you indifferent, too, like all others? Where the hell are you? Oh, lover, hold me in your arms! Cry for me, wherever you are. My soul, my darling, my life. I know you are somewhere. That you were probably looking at the same night sky as I was last night. Were you not? Think of me, in whatever abstract form you can; in whatever general idea your love can paint. That will be enough for now, but come soon! Darling, my soul cries. Unite your eyelashes with me. Share my tears. Your Amira needs you...

I finally enter the room, my eyes wet with tears. The figure engulfed in darkness sits there behind a desk. I take a chair and sit down before the silhouette.

"Hey, Amira," she says. "you're late."

"I know. I've been... I've just been thinking outside your office for a while."

"So," she says, "let's continue where we left off last time, shall we? Do you remember where we left off?"

"No, remind me, Arima," I say, disinterestedly.

"We were talking about how your break-up with Zayn was affecting —"

"Right, right. I remember," I cut her off. "Can we skip that? I don't really feel like talking about it, if you want to know the truth."

"Why? Is the memory too painful?" She studies me as she shoots her questions at me. I cringe. "No—not really."

"Come on, Amira," she pushes.

"I. Don't. Want. To. Talk. About. It.," I space out every word.

"You won't get better if we don't. And besides—"

"Can I just say one thing," I cut her off again.

"Ah... go ahead."

"It's not that the memory of making him block me is too painful. It's just that I don't feel it's important. There's a certain triviality to it, you see, that I want to try to acknowledge by not talking about it. By talking about it, I'd be giving this thought some power. This isn't cowardice, okay? It isn't."

"I didn't say it was. How long—"

"But you were heading there, weren't you?"

"No, not really, I just—" she tries to defend, but I interrupt her again.

"Just forget it. He's dead to me, okay? There's nothing more I have to say on this subject."

"Okay, fine. Let's just talk about the coping mechanisms—"

"Oh, here we go again. I said—"

"It's not what you think. Just hear me out."

"Fine," I grunt.

"There's a new technique I've been developing to bring a patient's authenticity to the surface," she goes on. "Would you mind trying it?"

"As long as we don't talk about him."

"We won't. I promise."

"Okay, then. Go ahead."

"I'll just start, okay? It may feel a little redundant at first, but bear with me."

"Sure."

"State your name."

"Amira Khan." I chuckle. *This is nonsense.*

"State your name," she asks again.

"Amira Khan."

"State your name."

My eyebrow slightly raises. What did Amira Khan even mean? "Amira...Khan."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"Are you in pain?"

"No."

"Are you in pain?"

"No."

"Are you in pain?" She emphasizes every single word this time. Tears start welling up in my eyes, and a nameless dread starts overtaking me, almost as if she cast a spell on me. "Yes. Is that what you want to hear? Huh?" I jump out of my seat and head for the door. "I'm done with this."

"Amira, come back. We're making a lot of progress," she calls after me calmly.

"Progress? This is progress?" I argue irritably. I am infuriated.

"Come on, sit down. We can abandon the technique. Let's just talk, okay? A normal conversation." Sighing, I sit down again.

"Are you angry?" she asks coolly, despite my exasperation.

"Yeah," I respond, annoyed.

"How do you deal with it, Amira?"

"What do you mean? I just swallow it and—"

"How do you find an outlet for it?" She doesn't let me finish. She knows I am trying to dodge her question.

"I've been thinking about something..." I begin.

"Let me guess. Meth?" she questions rhetorically, and I eye her suspiciously. "How would you know that?"

"I know everything you do. You—"

I am baffled. "How do you know that?" I snap at her.

"It's irrelevant. Let's just talk about why."

"I haven't used it yet or anything, okay?" I try to reassure. "It's just a thought—I might not even do it. I just sell it... I don't know why I'm even telling you this. But that's it, okay?"

"Drugs isn't the answer, Amira. You need to realize—"

"Save me the moralization, okay? It's more than you can ever understand. You don't know the pain. You don't know the torture."

"Then tell me," she says softly.

"No. Arima, I respect you and everything, but I am not capable of putting my pain into words. I doubt

you'd understand. I'll go insane if I don't use it, okay? I need it. I absolutely need it."

"Then let's just talk about how you got into this business in the first place, okay? I think it may be useful for—"

"Through a stupid friend of mine. That's it," I respond annoyingly, looking away.

"But why?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does matter. Tell me," she insists.

"You asked me that already. Pain. Danger. Thrill. Do you need me to draw you a picture?" Silence prevails for two minutes.

"It's just a break-up. You'll meet someone new. You'll move on. Don't do anything rash, okay? Don't be—"

"Shut up. Shut the hell up! I don't want to hear it. Shut your dumb mouth!" I am practically yelling at her.

"Don't use it, Amira," she warns me again.

"No, you don't get to—"

"Don't. Trust me, Amira. It's for your own good."

I heave an infuriated sigh as stomp up, and before violently slamming the door shut behind me, I turn to the silhouette and exclaim, "I'll do what I want. I'll use as much as I want, you hear me, Arima?! You don't get to tell me that this is not the way!"

Consummation

Late in the afternoon, I sit in my room, writhing in emotional agony. I am still ambivalent about how to deal with the excruciating pain. I lazily scan my room, as a packet of meth catches my sight, which I was supposed to drop off yesterday. *What's the worst that can happen*, I ask myself. *I can take it. I am stronger than anyone else*. I lock the bedroom door.

Like drinking from a straw, I consume. For a minute, I feel nothing. Then my feet suddenly turn cold, and all feeling washes away as soon as it enters my system—the pain slowly transforms into a faint memory. The heavy sighs, squealing cries, all slowly begin to fade. I feel braver—amazingly great. I have an impulse to destroy the world—to cause as much havoc as I am capable of. I feel this intense desire to snatch away the delusional contentment from everyone else, to show them their real faces, and to watch everything crumble down. I

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want to see everyone in excruciating pain, screaming their lungs out.

I am lying in my bed, staring at the ceiling, an emotional numbness beginning to overtake me. I can't feel anything except for a sense of a hazy elevation. *Tomorrow, I will meet Hamza in his apartment to get this business over with. I won't be the same girl after I am done with this,* I tell myself as I ring him.

"I opened a packet," I slur.

"Oh my god, how much did you use? Are you fine? Is your heart fine?" he asks, forcefully, and before I can answer, my phone battery dies.

After three hours of lying in bed, I finally unlock my door and make a beeline for Mom's room and find her asleep. I watch her sleep for hours, my sense of time numbing along with my emotions. My mind is wild; my imagination swoons over scenes of mass destruction, genocides, and war. I wish to remain frozen in this moment—that the ticking of the clock should stop, and the world should stand still.

The next morning, Hamza calls to ask if I overdosed. "Soon," I tell him. "Very soon."

Threat

I barely sleep for a week, the effects lasting for more than I anticipated. After waking up from an hour of sleep, I feel dreadfully irritated. It takes me a week or so before I am able to go to Hamza's to announce my retirement from this business.

I knock on his apartment door, feeling the pain slowly crawl back into my mind, and a few seconds later, he's standing in front of me. "Hey, it's Amzi," he says as he sees me at the door. "You almost gave me a heart attack last night, Amz."

"Listen... I, I—"

Before I can manage to say anything, he invites me inside. "Come in first. Let's have a proper conversation, okay?" I nod, as I follow him into the apartment, not surprised to see passed-out bodies lying around as I make my way. He motions for me to sit on the couch beside him. I obey. "So, what'd you wanna talk about?"

"I want to quit." I finally manage to say it.

"What?" He does not look like he was expecting the news.

"You heard me."

"Quit?" He still cannot seem to believe me.

"Yeah."

"Well... I suppose I should have seen this coming."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't remember? In your early days in this business, I told you that it wasn't suited for a girl like you, didn't I? Noman even told me that you were smart at school and all. I was sorry that he dragged you into this whole mess in the first place—"

"No, no. I remember that well."

"So, Amzi wants to quit now, huh?" I remain silent, letting him brood over it. He sighs. "I'm afraid I can't let you do that."

"Why? That's ridiculous."

"You know too much."

"So?"

"You know what I mean."

"Say it!" I spit.

"Maybe I'll be paranoid about you ratting me out." He sits with an expression of pathetic pity on his stupid face, playing with a pistol with his fingers.

"Oh, yeah?" I say and quickly reach for his pistol. "What're you doing?" he asks. I cock his pistol and press it against my forehead, my hands clasped on his hand with which he's holding the gun. "Kill me

then! I don't want to become a liability, and I don't care really. Go ahead."

"You're crazy," he looks at me like I am mental.

"Am I? So what good was it to bring up that you'll be paranoid?! What kind of a moron are you, you coward?" He grunts something under his breath—some gibberish, no doubt. "Don't you have a family, Amira?"

"They're all dead," I lie.

"A boyfriend?"

"He's dead too," I lie again, profound hatred surging up inside me.

"So, there's absolutely no one in this world who will come looking for you if you die?" I remain silent, taking in the futility of my existence. "Well?" He raises his eyebrow at me.

"No," I answer gravely.

"Hmm..." he considers it for a second, and then throws his pistol away, the pistol making a thud sound as it crashes into the oak floor. "I can't do this." I roll my eyes at him and slowly stand up, looking at him with an expression of annoyance.

"You should leave now, Amz," he says. "I've got some business to take care of."

"No. I'll just hang out here for a while."

"Suit yourself." He leaves, and I get up and walk around—trying to feel a goodbye from this horrid place.

Exorcism

I sit leaning against a festering wall, my head buried between my knees—a muffled scream stirring inside my mouth, as I am on the verge of incessant crying. As I look up, all I see are bodies lying on the apartment floor, practically lifeless, except for some faint movement of limbs. I stand up and go to the balcony, almost limping. I find a chair and seat myself, as I stretch my legs out to settle them on the railing, gazing up at the night sky. I close my eyes and attempt to daydream, which is my only consolation in this wretched state. The constituents of the darkness of my eyelids suddenly assume his form, and I see him standing before a lofty cottage, lovingly gazing at me with inviting eyes. "I love you, Amzi. Come with me. Here, hold my hand," he says and extends his hand to me. I am tempted for a moment, but I stand still, remembering his false promises of eternal union, of not becoming indifferent to me, of loving me no matter what. "No—you don't deserve it. I may still love you with all my heart, but you are dead to me," I answer.

"Why, my poppet?" he asks.

"Liar! You're a shameless liar! Everything between us was a lie! Go numb yourself! That's all you seem to want to do. I mean nothing to you and never have, have I? For once, tell me the truth. Can you do that for me?" I start crying. He stands there, perturbed. I see him slowly turn back and enter the cottage, slamming the door shut behind him. I shudder with horror at his lack of defensiveness.

My eyelids flutter open as I brush the tears away from my cheek. I gaze again at the night sky. The silent, annoyingly unresponsive, night sky, and suddenly I feel the temptation to scream my pain away, to encapsulate my despair into sound and send it soaring through the indifferent night sky—to *finally be rid of this parasite that preys on me, that gnaws at me with unforgiving cruelty. Why should I have to bear this sharp, slicing pain? Why should he go on being indifferent and uncaring—oh, loving hate! Someone kill me already!*

I don't have any interest in making choices anymore. I'd rather just lie flat somewhere, lost—perhaps in an absurd fantasy, and not feel anything that I don't deserve. Let others make decisions, reach places. Let them all get somewhere idiotic in their lives as they surely will. I am above them—my fortitude and my ability to hold my own is unmatched, and so shall it always be. No one really

hears me—no one purely hears my ramblings without some mean design, some despicable motive, bribing their ears. No one has sufficient interest in trying to untangle the mysterious knot that constitutes my being, my very self. And am I supposed to merely talk to myself? Am I to have no one who hears me solely for the sake of hearing, and for the sake of enhancing the magnitude of his true love? Could someone possibly care as much as I demand, or is it my own fault, wanting to be cared for? Is it some discrepancy between the reality of my situation and my instinctive programming that drives me forth? Oh, misdirected and unrequited passion—you shall be numbed again; you must be numbed forever. How else could I live another day? How else could I see indifferent faces ever again without descending into destructive madness, without tearing apart my own skin and killing them at the very sight of their malignancy? Everyone I know hurls their disappointment at me, as if I have a sign written on my forehead that says, "judge me." Why does my sensitivity have to give me these violent convulsions, these beatings of my heart, which are also caused by shaky existential despair that reinforces itself every time they dare to assess me? I am sick of this game—this constant routine of perception! They've made me a prisoner to myself. Where lies the key out of this paralyzing confinement? There is no exit.

The Stranger

I dream about a stranger. A lucidity of imagination—a scattering of fantastic phantoms, stuff of legend constitutes this magnificent dream. In the dream, I am standing outside my house, waiting for someone. A motorbike pulls up near me and stops a few feet away from me. Seated on it is someone who I feel I know, and yet I can't remember who he exactly is. His lustrous hair and piercing sharp eyes stand out as he treads graciously towards me with an infinitely reassuring smile on his face. Just as I see him walking towards me, I run back into the house and drag out two chairs and settle them right outside the main gate. I seat myself and motion for him to join me. He slowly seats himself and proceeds to eye me with pleasant wonder. We both stare at each other, and from my peripheral vision, I see everything slowing down; the walking children on the road slowly starting to freeze along with everything else in the surroundings. Only he and I are unstuck in time. "Don't you want to know about my past?" I ask him. He smiles. "The past doesn't exist, Amira."

"So, what am I to you?"

"To me? That's easy—you're a past-less nymph."

"A past-less nymph?" I ask, my interest piquing.

"Amira?"

"Yes, darling?"

"Thank you for existing."

"Promise me you'll always be with me."

"Forever and always." He smiles, and we eternally stare at each other with loving gazes.

Revelation

"Are you planning to end your own life, Amira?" Arima asks. "No. Not anymore. I have met someone," I respond.

"Yeah? That's very good news, Amira. I am happy for you." We remain silent for a minute. I am suddenly curious about something. "Let me take a look at your face," I say. "All I see is a silhouette."

"No, you don't want to do that, trust me. There's a reason for that."

"Come on," I urge. I walk towards the other side of the desk and shine a light on her face with the torch of my smartphone.

I shake with horror at the sight, my phone slipping out of my grip as I collapse right next to it. My heart thumps rapidly, and I am barely able to keep myself from screaming. *It's my face—she's me!* "See?" she asks with a tinge of malignancy in her—

my? —voice. The walls around me suddenly start squirming, and the room vibrates with increasing intensity until I close my eyes. For a minute, I lie there, my lips, my entire body trembling uncontrollably. Then I force my eyes open. This place is not a therapist's office anymore; it's my room. It's always been my room, I realize. I hate everyone is still scrawled on the wall, and I notice drops of blood trickling down the wall.

Instinctively, I look down at my nails. My nails are bloody and bitten down, and I see bits of the white wallpaper crusted deep under them. Tears of confusion and frustration begin to roll down my cheeks, as my mind fails to make sense of the situation. I seem to have lost control over myself, as my arm lifts itself to use my nails once more to scratch something new on the wall: *You'll be crying for me*. The room starts blurring around me, my breath slowly leaving me. *I am still all alone, now even stranded from myself*. Abruptly, a memory attacks me—a month-old memory.

I remember wandering through a beach, lost in my own mind. I peeked into the darkness, the horizon, and wondered. Wondered at the insignificance of my pain. *It's all in my head*, I told myself. *Under the guise of every meaning, every sense of existence, there is a human lie. And I am exempt even from this lie. Oh, with whom can I ever share my burden, my sight? Who amongst these morons will ever*

understand me? He was just as stupid as any other. The ideal companion can only ever be a figment of my own imagination.

This depresses me even more.

Genesis

I desperately reach for my drawer and fumble inside. I extract a photograph and bring it into my sight. It's my childhood photo. I am around five years old, and I am standing with a microphone in my hand, my eyes fixed on the camera with an expression of serene reassurance and infinitely pure innocence on my face. I am wearing a little dress, with sports shoes over my long white socks that almost reach my knees.

Tears start dripping down my cheeks, my face contorted into heart-wrenching despair for wishing the impossible, for the time of innocence to return. What is this fatally cruel pain that afflicts me compared to the surge of happiness at a little girl's, a daughter's innocent smile, her pouting lips, and her playful composure? This shall pass, the time shall pass too, but the creations that await me are still in wait of me, they need me. Every action I choose leads to an inexorable chain reaction, and I am responsible; ignorance of the future doesn't excuse me. I won't lie to myself. I won't kill my

future. I won't hold back from staring at the possibilities and growing anxiously dizzy, no matter how painful, how out of my ability to bear it may seem. I am stronger than they think—that's been my confession all along. And a husband? There may not be one. There may not exist anyone that can hinge together with me without causing me to lose myself. I need a vessel to pour my infinite love into—a receiver of all earthly blessings that my abilities render me capable of spurting forth; of all the harvest of a mother's bosom.

The morning sun finally rises, and sunlight permeates into my room, lighting the whole room with creative vitality, and for the first time in a long time, I feel some semblance of joy, some corpuscle of pending redemption. I smile, get out of my room, and make some coffee.

The Arrest

I'm sitting in my yard, slowly sipping my coffee and absorbing the magnificence of the rows and rows of beautiful roses that stretch outside my field of vision, the sunlight kissing my cheek, and I feel truly free. The creative mood is upon me—the live-giving and the maternal instinct. A breeze plays itself upon my face, and I sing again with my legs crossed, this time cheerfully. I see two pigeons

perched upon the lofty wall of the yard. One of them is little and is taking refuge under the wing of her mother. I stare at them for a while until they both finally fly off together. I feel an incredible surge of happiness at watching them fly away without looking back—carefree and finding only each other's company enough. My phone suddenly rings. I reluctantly pick up. "Amz?"

"Yes, Hamza? What is it now? I told you I wouldn't be a part of this business any longer, so don't—"

"Just listen to me. Something has happened." My heart begins to beats faster. "What?"

"It's your friend, Noman."

"He's not my friend anymore."

"He got arrested last night."

"What? How?"

"That's what we're wondering..." he presses, as if he's doubting me.

"You think it was me?" I snap in disbelief.

"I need to know, Amira," he continues firmly.

"Are you serious?"

"Just tell me you didn't snitch."

"Wow. Just... wow."

"Is that a no?"

I hang up. A rush of disconcerting paranoia, tentative nausea, is suddenly injected into my mind. I get up and start running, shaking with absolute horror. All my hopes are under attack. I quickly rush to my room, and I pull out my old duffel bag and start stuffing it with whatever I can perceive as important. I go to Mom's room for the last time, watching her sleep again, well aware this time, of all the moments that seem to pass by so fast, and I can hardly manage to steady my breath.

I am out of breath by the time I leave the house and head for the railway station, utterly terrified for my life for the first time in a while.

Redemption

When I arrive at the railway station, I am momentarily relieved as I mix into the crowd, looking behind me after every few seconds to ensure I am not being followed. I quickly buy a train ticket to Karachi and wait on a bench, trying to keep my head down all the while I sit there waiting. My heart is beating with worrying frequency, and all kinds of dreadful scenes are flowing through my imagination. I imagine myself sitting before a prison wall, staring into the array of rusting bricks,

numb and helpless, regretting my involvement and recklessness that brought me down.

The train arrives after an hour, and I quickly find my compartment and breathe a sigh of relief as I seat myself by the window. Even as the train starts to rattle on, I am paranoid that it will suddenly halt, and from some corner, they would arrive and take me back. Oh, such dreadful torture is the curse of paranoia that one can neither be relieved nor be ignored. Only death seems like a solution when faced with this cruel monstrosity. I gaze out the window, watching the fleeting scenes of date palm trees and then of barren land, the past left somewhere far behind. *There's still a lot to be lived for*, I decide.

Epilogue

Six risky years have passed by. The past has been repeated at last. I walk out of my garden and head inside the house. I rest in my bedroom, and a smile emerges on my face as little Amira comes waddling in, helplessly radiating a naive but adorable enthusiasm. "Where is daddy, mommy?" she asks, as she does every day. "He's with us, baby girl," I tell her yet again. "He's always with us. You'll see him in your dreams, baby."

"Promise, mommy?"

"Mommy promises, baby." I tuck her in.

I see him in my dreams every night, and we still eternally gaze at each other in every encounter, the time frozen forever. Unlike me, little Amira will have all the love and care of a mother. Perhaps he does actually exist, and maybe the day, when we shall meet at last, is not afar.

This is what I wish to live for now—for little Amira and the dream of him, the loving stranger, my second self. Many new adversities shall come, but my only treasured intoxication shall be instilled at his mere sight, the metallic rasp of his voice, and being beholden by him as the most special of all—the past-less nymph, the unstained little girl, and the most passionate lover of all his perfect imperfections. The melody of his voice is eternally lodged into my mind. It accompanies me into every darkness, brings his form into existence to caress me, and soothe my soul like no other. He is more than flesh, and so shall he always be. He shall always steal after me in my loneliest hour, he shall keep me going, and with him and little Amira will the rest of my life pass with the joyous of joys and the painful of pains.

Our violent delights might have violent ends, but we would not have it any other way anyway now, would we? The unerring past has been pulled back into being, and we all wish to start all over again.

A Chronicle of Memories

And what is more beautiful than a fresh start, an attempt to strive closer and closer to perfection with every passing day? When is that day when we shall cry with relentless joy at witnessing our own pasts perfected by us for our creations—the past that taunted and haunted us so much? No matter how hopeless life may seem, no matter how unlivable existence may become, the abyss of the past does have an end. And it is at that end that the past exists no longer. Let's jump together into that abyss with the fortitude of an adventurer who knows no fear, who never looks back, who doesn't compromise the blank canvas of the present and the future with the rusting stains of a currently non-existent past.