

Oriental Flower

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They registered it as a suicide case, completely ignoring that it had been a premeditated crime. The case began with the residents of Zaatari camp waking up at the tragic death of a woman in her forties, who suffered Tourette's Syndrome. The investigators were aware of the involuntary actions and psychological pressures caused by this syndrome, which made it the cause of the suicide. For Julia, it was not that simple. The interrogator explained to her that paroxysms seized her while cutting meat, so she unintentionally cut her neck. Therefore, I inquired about the victim's relation to the meat cutting incident, while she did not even eat it all. When the interrogator, perplexed, looked at her, she said that one of the victim's neighbors invited her one day for meat soup, but the victim turned down the invitation, saying that she was a vegetarian.

"Perhaps you just don't want to accept the invitation," the officer laughed sarcastically. Julia replied sharply that she had not finished her speech yet, and that she also knew that the victim used to be absent from her residence for days and nights before her death, and anxiety and fear always showed on her during that period. She also completely refused to talk about what was happening to her, which means that she was in close association with certain people shortly before her death, and these people must be known because they are major parties in the case.

The officer laughed more sarcastically, and said, "I regret to inform you that the victim was a prostitute". Julia felt that her position had become weak to the investigator, so she wondered about the missing kidney of the victim, and the possibility of human organ trafficking. This time, the investigator took a

deep breath, referring to a medical report proving that the victim had one of her kidneys infected by a malignant tumor. She smiled arguing that it was strange that an investigator had no knowledge of the tactics of human organ dealers, especially false medical reports, to evade legal accountability. Sensing the amount of sarcasm in her tone, and before asking her to leave, the officer hit the table hard, shouting that all pieces of evidence pointed to the fact that it was a suicide. She replied that she was not a recruit working under his command. Then, she reminded him of her legal capacity as a lawyer who derived her authority from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

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Julia was convinced that the investigator was incompetent to handle such a case, so she decided to return to the camp, hoping to find out what was causing the victim to be absent from her home for long periods. She did not find a satisfactory answer, but most of those she asked unanimously agreed that the victim was going eastwards. Julia therefore took the same direction, trying to visualize the same situation the victim was experiencing, when she was walking these roads. She was so emotionally carried away that she almost cried. She took notice of the branches piled up in a suspicious manner, especially as they lay in front of a remote corner of the retaining wall, which marked the end of the eastern border of the camp. Quickly, she removed the branches, realizing that the victim had often walked through there. When it was over, she found a hole that would allow her to slink to the other side. Without hesitation, she squeezed herself through the hole, continuing

towards the east, where she saw a row of trees that seemed to be forcibly planted there.

Her feelings mixed between joy and fear. On the one hand, she was sure that she would hold a decisive thread in the case, and on the other, she was afraid of that remote unknown spot. Her fear was exacerbated when she found an abandoned cottage. Cautiously entering it, she saw rotten leftovers, empty wine bottles, tattered and torn women's underwear, used condoms, and medical equipment covered in dried blood. But what shocked her most were the words written on the door in dried blood, "Jasmine flower". She called the investigator directly, asking him to come in and inspect the new evidence. But the investigator did not take the matter seriously, saying that he would come when possible, since what Julia found would not convince the investigator that it had anything relevant to the case. She was angry at the investigator's indifference, and was determined to file a complaint against him. This coincided with her phone being knocked to the ground. At that moment, she was surprised by the crack of the phone had caused against the worn-out wood, and so a scarlet scarf appeared from underneath. She eagerly took it out, and pieces of paper, cuddled inside it like a baby, fell down. She felt with her fingertips what was written on the first piece of paper, "The Tragedy of Jasmine," and then proceeded with the rest of the pieces.

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"My mother gave birth to me by the jasmine tree, then she died. My grandmother told me she couldn't stop the bleeding. My birth coincided with the curfew imposed by the military authorities on the city of Hama in the spring of 1982. Forty thousands dead, perhaps my father was among them. Perhaps he was among the tens of thousands arrested in underground vaults. My grandmother and I fled the hell of Hama, to our relatives in

Daraa. I was not mature at the time to remember any suffering I went through with my grandmother, but I still recollected every day, as the teacher told me, "Your parents haven't raised you well." He did not know that I had neither a mother nor a father, just as he was ignorant of the reality of my illness, and of the convulsions, involuntary movements, and sounds it caused that came out unintentionally. Their way of treating me was my expulsion from school. Do not believe them, mother. I sought to be a doctor to stop the bleeding that killed you. And do not believe them, as my grandmother believed them, when she took me to a quack doctor, who convinced her that my body is the abode of evil spirits, which caused these involuntary sounds and movements. He cut all my hair, then stuck the needle several times into my little bald scalp, rubbing it with salt and vinegar. Then, he proudly looked at my grandmother, claiming that my weeping and screaming came from evil spirits which were now dying thanks to his innovative treatment. Very quickly, he went to get his taser, saying that it would prevent the spirits from coming back. Before him coming back, I ran away. When I got to our neighborhood, people were frightened at my sight and ran away. Even you, my mother, you wouldn't feel safe if you saw my shaven head, covered in blood, and the quack doctor and his aides chasing after me. From that day on, my name became the demon's daughter. My grandmother despaired of my treatment, after she gave her gold to a man, who went to buy for its price a plant that grew out beside a volcano in the North China Sea. I don't know if he fell into the volcano, but he didn't come back! My grandmother passed away, and she had advised my relatives to treat me well, but they did not heed her advice. She used to beat me, ill-treat me, and deprive me of food and drink. In addition, there was a cold and dark basement, much like a tomb, they made a

home for me and a shutter for them against my voices and my movements, which made them feel embarrassed in front of their guests. The guests once heard the sound of my paroxysm, so they asked my relatives in astonishment, ‘Since when did you buy a dog?’ The answer was sarcasm and bullying, ‘You mean a ferocious dog’. It seemed that they were afraid that I might one day bite them, so they decided to get rid of me by getting me a marriage.

‘Knowing that it was impossible for anyone to marry me, they let me be the prey for a man, who they said he had raped me, and because our customs forgave the rapist if he married his victim, they made him my husband against his will. He was kindhearted and shy. I was sad to know he was autistic. To alleviate his suffering, and to be a mother to a baby, I created a romantic atmosphere one night for him. I switched off the lights and lit the fire of our candle. I perfumed the air of the room with a spray of rose water and lemon, prepared two glasses of cellared wine, and furnished the bed with orchids. I exposed myself to him that night, like almond blossoms blooming at the advent of spring. As for him, he expressed his happiness by committing suicide, as he could not withstand the gossip of the neighborhood! Perhaps he would have abstained from committing suicide if he had known about Zahra, our child.

‘That became the most beautiful thing in my life. She shook off my sorrows, and took care of me as I did to her. When she joined the school, I made a promise to myself that I would fulfill my dreams that had been robbed of me, through my Zahra. But it was all over. One day, I went to bring her home from school, but I was shocked to be told that a man had taken her, claiming he was her grandfather. When I asked about his description, it turned out that he was indeed my father-in-law. Strangely enough, I had not

told them I was pregnant. After my husband had committed suicide, his father kicked me out. When I learned of my pregnancy after a while, I chose not to inform them, for fear of forcing me to have an abortion, and for fear of the day when they would deprive me of my daughter. I passed out, after knowing that they had left Daraa.

‘I woke up to find myself in a small room painted white; it also had a white bed, and I was in white clothes. Against me was a window overlooking jasmine trees, surrounded by buildings, inside which all people wore white. They differed in that some of them were tied to their clothes, and some were free to move. I felt that it was a dream, until I saw my hands tied too, and heard someone tell one of them that the patient had become conscious, so a number of people in white clothes gathered around me, and while I asked them, my mother, where I was, I explained to them my condition. Why did they tie me up? They gave me a shot that made me ecstatic and lost in space, sometimes in the distant past that I didn’t know, and sometimes in the future that I couldn’t recognize. My mother, I woke up from my coma and from my dream, and I found myself in a lunatic asylum. All I remember before I came was that I was looking for the flower of my heart Zahra, so I went to the police department to tell them, but they did not believe me and they thought I was a crazy liar. I could not convince them and prove that I had a child, so my marriage contract had not been officially registered, because of the story of my marriage that I told you about, as well as someone forging Zahra’s birth certificate, and because the law is with those who pay more.

‘They took it from me but did not believe me, my mother, so I became angry and with my anger increased my spasms and involuntary voices. Even my insults increased; they did not know that this is the nature of

my illness, and this is how they admitted me to the lunatic asylum.

“I tried to escape and succeeded, so the journey began as a quest for Zahra, in schools, roads, and neighborhoods. I did not find her, my mother. By chance, one morning, I heard the radio announcing the news that a seven-year-old girl from Deir ez-Zur, Fatima Mahran Khalil Mahran, had won a chess competition. I cried out of elation at hearing the news. She was Zahra, my mother, she was my daughter! They named her Fatima after her grandmother. Mahran was my husband’s name, and Zahra’s hobby was chess, and the age was also identical to hers, so I packed up and headed for Deir al-Zur.

“On the road, the security checkpoint stopped me, checking the arrivals and departures. They sent me back to the mental hospital after verifying my identity. Pained and wounded, I stayed there, oppressed and sorrowful at the loss of my flower Zahra. I stayed until an explosive barrel fell on the courtyard of the hospital garden, on that jasmine tree, and burned it up all its branches and flowers.

“After communicating with international organizations, the hospital administration transferred us to the Zaatari camp, which was set up by the United Nations in Jordan for refugees fleeing the war in Syria. There, a doctor saw me and told me that my convulsions and involuntary voices were caused by Tourette’s Syndrome, and that I was not insane nor possessed by evil spirits, my mother. When I was released, I did not know that I would fall into the hands of a human monster named Alaa. We, the women of the East, especially the refugees, are very weak, my mother. They gather around us as hyenas gather around their prey. Marriage is not marriage, but rape and coercion forced by the father who covets the groom’s money, so he sells his daughters as a commodity, and each one has a price under the name of the

dowry. The older is not like the younger, and the virgin is different from the one who lost her virginity. The hyena chooses whoever he likes and prides in her like a key ring or a car, caring the less about her emotions and feelings. He brushes those feelings away after his vacation and lust ends, so he leaves her alone. Afraid of going back to her father, she keeps getting caught in the hands of human hyenas, and he also doesn’t know what comes around goes around. He returns home with gifts to surprise his wife, but he finds her sleeping with the guard of his house, so he kills her in the name of honor. Yet he forgot that he is dishonorable. Among these hyenas, too, he comes to marry at the age of seventy, not for fun. His penis has failed to erect, and semen has dried up inside, but he wants a maid. Instead of hiring a servant who costs him 500 dollars a month, he marries one of the camp girls. These are the human hyenas.

“As for me, my mother, as I told you before, I fell into the hands of human monsters, who entered my life under the pretext of helping me find Zahra. I was searching for Zahra among the newcomers and residents of the camp. One of them told me he could help me flee the camp to Turkey in quest of Zahra, since most probably she would be there. At the outbreak of the war in Syria, people fled from their homes for fear of death: those close to Turkey went there, and those close to Jordan fled to it. Thus, and because I knew that Zahra was closer to Turkey than Jordan, I decided to go to Turkey to look for her. But there was a problem of the lack of money, so this monster told me, as if eager to please, that his friend would purchase a human kidney for 3000 dollars, and that a person could live with one kidney.

“I considered it a sacrifice on my part to find Zahra. They persuaded me, and I agreed for the sake of the flower of the East, Zahra. We agreed to meet outside the camp, in a cottage, accessed by a hole under the

eastern wall of the camp. I got to the cottage and didn't know anything after that. I woke up in a hospital, and the security came to interrogate me on suspicion that I was a victim of human organ trade. For my fear of losing the money to travel to Turkey, I did not tell them the truth. They made sure that there was no suspicion of human organ trafficking, so they closed the file without even studying it. I returned to the camp with my wounds that did not and would not heal, and with the sum that I would get to travel to my daughter that made it easier for me to wait.

“After a while, Alaa came to me, asking to accompany him to the cottage to receive the money. I went with him overjoyed at imagining myself flying to meet Zahra. Torn between the hope of meeting my daughter and the pain of my kidney, I arrived at the cottage and on my arrival, there was another disappointment. A large crowd of men dressed me in tarty clothes, and made me dance for them, and then they slept with me. The intensity of the pain I did not feel the pain, and I saw my inevitable end. I made a last wish – to write down my story. It came about after men had dampened the ecstasy of their drunkenness, drugs, and sex. I picked up a pen and a piece of paper that was waiting for me myself to write on them before I could breathe my last. ‘My daughter, my love, Zahra, if one day you happen to read these words, know that I love you, and that I am waiting for you in a better world.’”

Julia hugged the papers, crying, “This is me, mom, I'm Zahra, mom.” Since Julia read the news of Yasmine's death on social media, she knew that she was her mother. This confirmed to her the age of the victim, and that she had Tourette's Syndrome, in addition to the not indecipherable emotions that the victim's picture aroused in her.

Zahra had fled with her grandfather, after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. In Turkey, she studied international law. With the help of one of her teachers, she managed to impersonate a UNHCR lawyer. She was absolutely certain that her mother had not committed suicide, but was the victim of a vast criminal network. This is what she herself proved when she came to Jordan.

She grabbed the papers, intent on going to the investigator to declare Jasmine's innocent. But no sooner had she turned around than she was surprised by someone at the door of the cottage. She drew back, as he whizzed past the wooden floor, saying he had known it was her daughter at first. She answered him in a weeping voice whether he was Alaa, so he nodded in assent, while picking up a bottle of wine. Her fear increased as she asked him what he would do, so he broke the bottle, saying in a feigned tone of sadness, that he would have qualms for killing botha mother and her daughter. I asked him why did you kill her? He said, as if claiming innocence, that he had not killed her, but that they found her dead after waking up from their orgasms that night. Therefore, they secretly brought her back home, and fabricated the suicide case by placing meat near her, suggesting that she had been cutting it. Of course, they had been aware of the nature of her involuntary movements, so we were not worried that the police would close the case as a suicide. Zahra collapsed crying, while Alaa approached her, insisting on killing her. But at this very moment, the investigator entered with his special squad, asking Alaa to lay down his weapon and surrender, or else they would kill him.

After catching the criminal, the investigator softened at Zahra's case, and informed her that he had contacted the UNHCR to lay a complaint about her disorderly behavior, and she was surprised that they had not sent anyone in the first

place. He called her angrily, but was surprised that she hung up, even though she had spoken to him a while ago, to inform him that she had found a cottage containing crucial evidence. Therefore, he went straight to the cottage to find a man confessing the crime to Zahra.

Looking at him, and with a frail smile, she said that it was a draw like this: she impersonated a character, and he neglected the investigation. They both laughed, knowing that the jasmines of the East would be plucked every day, but that their flowers would bloom again.