

Insomnia by Syed Kazim Ali Kazmi

It was never like this, for him everything around was a part of big charisma. Now whenever he looked back, his thoughts would take him in to a realm where the haunted images of his past stirred his feelings. The ecstasy of those intimate experiences, where he sheared his breathes in harmony with nature.

Is it possible for him to have that everlasting feeling of togetherness again?

Maybe not, people said, “Gods have cursed you.”

Whenever he asked about the reason of his curse, he never found the answer. They, also, had never told him the reason of being cursed.

Is it possible that gods will curse someone without a reason?

A mild cry broke the continuity of his thoughts. It was coming from the next room. He lifted himself with effort. A pang of sheer pain went through his body, for some moments he stayed motionless. He felt like millions of nails were being hammered into his joints. Before going out, he saw his face in the mirror. It was not his face, rather, the face of a man who really was cursed.

He never thought that he would be left alone like this. Only because he looked different, he was not born with it. Whenever his mother came to see him, he always felt being lost in somewhere between being there or somewhere in a big void of the universe. She looked at him as if he was not there. It was like being stuck between two worlds, although, just two days ago his mother came and announced that some organization had offered them for his complete treatment; it is possible that he would be able to move on with his life in the coming days, after being operated. She showed much hope, but for him, it was much like the same as it had happened earlier. The agony and pain he suffered in a lame hope for a cure. After some days, he was at the hospital and his treatment started instantly.

He became a man of wonder for everyone. Cameras flashed on his face, journalists looked at him as if they had found a source that would escalate their newspaper’s circulation; they were already thinking about the headlines. Meanwhile, doctors were ever more enthusiastic for showing his extremities above his head so that the tumorous growth on his skin could be seen more clearly. He felt like a zoo animal and wanted to go home, back to his place where there was nothing, but the absence of humans around him ensured peace. In his loneliness, there was no one to look at him in pity, hate, fear or as an accursed.

His urge for going home and sitting under that big tree, which was there long before his birth, increased instantly. That tree had seen many children growing under its long twisted branches. While sitting beneath that tree he used to look like a part of its rough skin, it seemed as if the

same tree had started to grow on his skin. That tree had been his friend since his childhood; he ate, slept, and even bathed under its massive boughs, when his father died that tree expanded its branches to embrace him, his many sleepless nights were spent under it.

Soon after his father's death, the tumors started to grow over his face first, then within days, they covered almost whole of his body. They were growing so rapidly that soon he could not distinguish between his own fingers, his hand turned out to be a massive bulk of growth. So big and hard that his sense of touch almost died, he was unable to feel anything with his hands. He soon forgot what his hands looked like; there was no difference between his palm and the back of his hand. Then it reached his feet and they, too, turned into a bulky mass. Nails disappeared and horn-like growth kept growing, though it never gave him pain but these were feeding on his blood, slowly eating away his flesh, and turning him into a log eaten away by termites.

He slept uneasily, though the doctors gave him medication for sleep. He dreamt about that large tree that stood in his yard, shadowing its creepy branches, twisted like the hands of an old man, strained under the load of time. He saw himself sitting still under the same tree with a dagger in his hand. He looks at the dagger, slides his finger on the edge of the blade and starts to cut his cancerous growth with it. It is strange that he is not feeling any pain though his blood is dripping. He is feeling dizzy, about to drop unconscious but before that, he stabs that dagger into the trunk with all of his remaining force. A greenish sticky liquid oozes out with a burst and sticks to his face and hands.

He, instantly, feels soothed to have that gelatinous mass all over him. The blood starts to congeal, soon after that, secretion starts to eat away his flesh and begins to grow again. The tumors are back....

He opened his eyes with effort and looked at the doctor who was entering the room with an air of indifference. He had just woken up from the sleep induced by anesthesia. He tried to raise his head but failed. His whole body was covered with bandages. He was feeling neither pain nor anything else, not even his extremities. His feeling of being was lost; the curse induced by gods was wrapped in finely done bandages, heaving some balmy medicine underneath.

"How are you feeling?" asked the doctor.

He just nodded in response.

"We are working on your case, and we have been consulting other doctors as well, possibility of performing more operations is there. We are seriously considering it. So far, we have removed quite a lot of mass, which has been growing around your hands, feet and the rest of body. Almost sixty percent of the work has been finished. You will be free to go in a couple of months.

"Couple of months?" He thought with fear. "Will I survive this"? He tried to think but everything was so blurred that he could not.

I think it would be better to start the acid treatment for which we need to burn your tumors with it. We would expect that this growth then would be easy to remove. The attending doctor suggested.

He wanted to ask the doctor, “What is the point of putting him through this hell, isn’t he already in one?”

He tried to utter some words but the bandage around his face did not let him.

Doctor told him in a professional and indifferent manner, as if he was talking not about a living human in agony but a lifeless subject undergoing some experiment.

Beyond his room the world was loaded with busy, living, healthy and responsible humans moving along with their respective loads of work. Some searched for bus tickets in their left back pockets. They would grope inside their pockets with their two fingers to feel the ticket and would be satisfied to find it resting there. Most of them knew where they were headed because they had packed some clothes to wear along with a shaving kit in a bag. There were women walking through the main market with something in hand to eat, while trying to conceal their last weeks of pregnancy, a little one clinging to their left hip and a four and a half year old clenching the corner of their large curtain type chadaar. The young boy licked a half melted ice candy and looked at the shops where beautiful dresses were hanging in finely packed wrappers waiting to be bought. Life moved on. He could see all that, from beyond the walls of the hospital and the road after that to the line of trees where small sparrows make noise when they assemble with their close ones after a long day’s tiring search of food.

The doctor had already left the room. A nurse came soon after, monitored the vitals and made an entry in the patient’s file. She looked like a doll, with a constant, expressionless face with upwardly curved lips. When she was leaving the room, she looked at him and smiled. Her eyes never smiled.

He was back in his realm of dreams, which to him were more real than the reality itself. These dreams have kept him alive during the preceding months. He often thought of getting married with a beautiful girl from his town after being cured. He liked her, he dreamed about her because she never behaved as if she stood closer to him his curse would grab her too, maybe gods won’t be happy. He dreamed himself on a patch of land where the blossoms were in their full bloom, nightingales chirped, fountains sprout crystal clear water and he was able to touch and feel the mesmerizing chill. This filled his heart with ecstasy. He used to feel like being in a phase of enchantment.

The door opened again and this time his mother entered.

In the dim light, a familiar face reached to kiss his forehead but he could not feel the warmth and love of her touch. His mother put her hand on his wrapped sylvan arm. He looked at her and saw the light of setting sun coming from the back window. Then he closed his eyes once again.

Syed Kazim Ali Kazmi, teaches English language to diverse young students at a university. His research interests are in Postcolonial literature, globalization, cultures, diaspora literature, and narratives. He is an amateur painter and also writes short stories and poems.

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