

*Creative writing: Olivia Althoff*

When I first came to my new home, after left my parents, I was devastated. The people here were so different and no one cared what I did but I could finally pray whenever I wanted and nobody questioned my beliefs.

Today I was supposed to meet the leader of our group, Jusuf, they didn't tell me much so I was honestly scared when they brought me into a dark small room with nothing but a chair in it and a single light bulb poorly enlighten the bare walls.

They kept me waiting for about half an hour and even though I was keen on meeting Jusuf and proving myself to him, I still felt an irritating fear in my heart.

When Jusuf entered the room, the light bulb flickered like it could feel his superior presence I even believed to notice a drop in the temperature.

For a while, Jusuf was just standing still in the room, watching me. He was a tall young man with dark hair and a long but neat beard which he was casually padding as if he was considering what kind of human I was. Despite his impressing dark aura, he didn't look dangerous in anyway, it was actually quite the opposite: he was very slim and almost seemed sick.

"So, you are the one who came here with the totally trashed face?" he asked, his voice deep, calm and without any emotion but wonder.

"Yes, that was me, I am Ali"

"Mhh, well than hallo Ali. I guess you know I am. I'm just wondering who would beat up such a faithful Muslim like you?"

I felt uncomfortable answering his question "My father" my voice broke unwillingly and I felt my cheeks blushing.

"So, your father, huh? He is a bad man, then? Tell me about him, tell me about your life before you joined us." Jusuf now pulled out a chair from the darkest corner of the room and I was surprised I didn't noticed it earlier. He sat down and looked at me, demanding.

"My father, Parvez, is an awful Muslim, he grew up in Lahore but he was ungrateful for his chances there, he told me he didn't liked the way they treated him, he was such a fool, throwing away all his possibilities and coming here in this toxic environment."

Jusuf raised one of his eyebrows "Why toxic?"

My cheeks flushed again because I felt embarrassed by my father`s sins and I could feel an empowering anger towards Parvez.

"He got influenced by the western society. They took him from us now he is one of them. He eats bacon, drinks alcohol and hangs out with this filthy prostitute. I mean, he was so occupied with being British he didn't even bother to at least provide my religious education." I snapped.

Jusuf watched my angry behavior carefully from his chair, he hesitated a minute before he asked: "So, your father never followed the rules of the Koran at all?"

I was answering before I thought: "Well, not exactly; he did follow the rules but he made excuses more often than not."

I instantly regretted my answer when I saw a hint of suspicion rising on his face.

“But when you noticed your growing interest in your religion you asked him to get you a proper education and he denied it, right?”

I stopped, caught off guard by his question. My brain was running in circles trying to remember: Did I asked him? Why wouldn't I ask him?

My eyes met Jusuf's while I was still trying to answer his question and I realized that he was still waiting for response. I opened my mouth, already forming an explanation for my silence in my mind but Jusuf started talking before I could: “I see, well enough of religion. Tell me more about the life he lived, what does he look like? What's his job?”

He seemed annoyed by my uncertain behavior. While I was uncomfortably sliding around in my chair, he sat in front of me leaning back with crossed legs and arms and completely still.

I start to explain: “He looked like an older me, my mother used to say.” I flinched unknowingly when I thought about her. Even though she wasn't a great help in the last few weeks I still felt sorry for leaving her without any explanation.

“He worked as a taxi driver and he destroyed our whole family with that. He would work thru the nights and then sleep the whole day to avoid my poor mother. Parvez never treated her right, he never had enough respect.

When he came home he would always pour himself a drink, his “treat after a long day” was what he called it. So irresponsible.” I went on.

Jusuf nodded to himself and pointed out: “Ah, so you were the one taking care of your mother, you were holding the family together.”

Now it was my turn to nod. At that point I reached the state of total confusion, I mean, I knew he was right with saying that I held the family together but I never saw myself like that and does that mean when I was letting go of Parvez I was actually destroying my family myself?

“The prostitute?” Jusuf's question ripped me out of my thoughts.

“What?”

“You mentioned your father was spending time with a prostitute. Do you know if he was cheating on your mother with her?” Jusuf now leaned his upper body towards me with a sudden interest.

“I honestly don't know much about it and I don't want to. I only met her once in Parvez's taxi. I think she was called Bettina or something. I made clear that I would not have any contact with a woman like her and as a response she jumped out of the driving car, such a crazy person.” I shook my head recalling that bizarre scene.

Jusuf was occupied with his thoughts for a while than looked at inquiringly: “So you do think they had sex with each other?”

I wanted to just answer “yes” but these three dammed letters were stuck in my throat and made me cough slightly.

Saying “yes” to this question felt like lying and I hated myself and Parvez and Bettina for that, I even hated Jusuf for asking the question at all.

“Ali” Jusuf was faster to speak again “how far are you willing to go for our thing?” he now looked at me like I was a stupid child.

“As far as possible” I clarified with a strong voice and for once, today, totally convinced.

“Really? Because right now I see an angry little boy who wants to hurt his father.”

Jusuf’s face was laying in the shadows now and I could feel the fear from the beginning, growing in my heart.

“No, no. You got it all wrong, I... I don’t care about my father I will give up everything for this, I mean, I gave up everything, my girlfriend, my friends, hell, even my own mother.” I claim helplessly choking on my words.

Jusuf was laughing a bitter laugh that sent shivers down my spine.

“What do you think we are doing here? Singing kumbaya and praying to Allah that there will finally be a change?” Jusuf looked at me and a sinister smile grew on his face.

“We are here because we want to end the ones who were suppressing our people, we no longer accept other religions or people who have none. We want the jihad and we will start our cleans with all the Muslims who betrayed the Koran, we will start with sinners like your father.”

One minute ago, my heart was beating so fast, I thought it would jump out of my chest and run away without me but now it stopped beating completely, my tongue was dry and my body was numb.

“What?” I howled

I have been mad at my father and I am still angry with him now and yes, I wished for his death on dark days, I can’t deny that. But I never honestly considered harming him fatally even after he beat me up.

Jusuf’s smirk vanished and was replaced by a dark and serious look, “I will ask you this only once, Ali, and you can either stand with us or not stand at all.”

I was torn inside, was this really what I wanted when I came here? Is it even rightful to kill people because of religious reasons?

I try to finally answer but my brain only attaches senseless words to another: “I.... It’s.... Well.... You’ll have to... “I stutter desperately.

I sigh and shrink in my chair, then I conclude shyly and whispering: “I don’t know.”

Jusuf rolls his eyes and I can feel anger pulsing off his body, luckily, he takes a minute to calm down.

“You can be very grateful that I’m nice today. I’ll leave this room for the next fifteen minutes, I’ll also leave the door open and when I come back and you are no longer here I will forget that I ever saw you and never speak about this again. If you decide to stay and I will find you here waiting, you’re in. You’re in forever and we will fight together and die together. Understood?”

He does not look at me again and I have barely time to squeeze out: “Yes!” before he rushes outside and actually leaves the door wide open.

I observe the door not knowing what to do or think. I’m not sure if I can trust Jusuf’s offer or if this maybe is a set-up to test my loyalty, I’m not even sure if I want to leave or stay.

My brain goes over every possible thing that could happen over and over again until my numb limbs finally start to move on their own. I turn my body towards the door like I am possessed by a higher force and then I stand up.