

Amir Darwish 2280 words Short Story

Harrods Fever

“Turn it off,” I say as I reach Hessa’s phone. I hand it to Hessa.

“Why?” she frowns.

“They cannot hear us through the mic if the phone is off.” I say, pointing an index to my right ear hole.

“Who is they” Hessa inquires.

“MI5, they have been at it for years and they want me to lose my mind.”

“How long have you been suffering from psychosis?”

“Almost two years now.” I reply, my head low and both hands resting on the coffee table. “I am not sick, they are really after me, they want me to become mentally unwell, lose my mind and either kill myself or end up in hospital forever. My childhood has something to do with it, I was abused sexually, physically, emotionally and psychologically. I take some pills to calm me down but I am certain that if they stop watching me I will be fine, but they won’t stop.”

“Why are they interested in you?” Hessa asks me as she touches my cheek with her warm hand.

“Because I am originally Middle Eastern and have a difficult past, they think I am more prone to become a terrorist.”

“What is it like?” Hessa continues to caress my face.

“What is what like?” The table is beige, with coffee rings.

“To live a life where you always paranoid, constantly in worry, fearful and scared?”

“It is hell, but I take each day at a time. I say to myself, ‘the worst that can happen is to commit suicide. It is not a bad thing at all, instead it is an end to every painful thing someone can think of’ You know, that he who kills himself is a free man. I read it somewhere,” I sound more confident than I feel.

“That’s macabre,” Hessa replies.

“Death is the ultimate control that someone can take. Nothing matters whatsoever if someone makes a decision to die. It is such a great feeling.”

“My God, Adam, why say such a thing?” Hessa says with her hand on her mouth.

“It is such a comfort to know that you can control what happens and to commit suicide is the ultimate control of everything. Even Allah the almighty cannot stop you. That enables me to go through the days more easily. Anyway, since I started seeing you, many questions are in my mind, but one in particular is more urgent than others.

“What’s that?” Hessa fold her hands.

“What makes you love someone like me? I am fat, hairy, physically and mentally sick. I don’t have money. I cannot even perform sexually due to the medications I take.” I say with eyes low on the ground.

“I don’t know. I cannot explain the feelings. I just love you. I love you even more than ever the more I hear about your difficulties.”

“Do you love me, or my difficulties?” I ask Hessa while silently I think perhaps she wants to trap me and that she is part of MI5 plan to drive me mad or push me to take my life.

“No, I love you, I really do.”

Hessa is an Aries: generous, optimistic, enthusiastic. Yet only when she meets me, she discovers that she also has two more Aries characteristics: independence and courage. She cannot not obtain these two while back home in the Gulf. Hessa finds her independence valuable, and to her surprise, she comes to experience independence even in her relationship with me: something she never thought will happen yet but now it does.

“Do you need a hand?,” are my first words to Hessa on the first day we meet. I decide to visit Harrods that day and dreamt about buying expensive things. I often visit posh stores to fulfil that dream. Hessa is fresh off the Emirates plane that lands daily in Heathrow from Dubai. Our eyes fall on each other accidentally. Hessa wears a colourful Hijab with tight blue jeans and has a make up which you can tell it has been done professionally by a make up artist. I knew straight away then, she is a Gulf princess.

As Hessa tries to move forward, her hand luggage slip from her hand to the floor. The cheapest bag in the store is worth one month salary of my father’s. He is a steel worker. The food court has caviar from Russia, coffee from Ethiopia and Brazil and fruit and vegetables from Spain. On to the first

floor clothes are on display, with every famous brand you think of here: Christine Dior, Tommy Hilfiger, Stella McCartney, Giorgio Armani.

I bet Hessa can afford anything in here. “Let me help,” I insist, as my eyes innocently fell on hers. “Your first look gave me a feeling,” Hessa tells me later. “A feeling that is inexplicable.”

That day I eye up her body, her curves, her pointy breasts, her smooth facial foundation as it mixes with her coffee skin.

“Do you work here?” Hessa asks me.

“No, I don’t, but I am happy to help.”

“Maybe I will need your help at some point during my visit here in London. What’s your number?” asked Hessa while reaching for her latest iphone from her bag.

Her asking for my phone number, makes me sure that she is an agent and part of the plan for MI5 to drive me crazy.

I hesitate at first but then “Of course, here is my number” I reply as I reached my old-fashioned phone from the right pocket.

“As soon as you walked away that day,” Hessa tells me later, “I got a shiver through the spine. Never before have I asked a man for his number.”

As Hessa leaves, the smell of her Arabic *Oud* perfume invades my head. That day, she questions her action and wonders why do it now? Why with that particular person?

On that first day we meet, Hessa moves around the store with her eyes wide open to examine if I might appear again. Her chauffeur and car wait for her outside. As she goes into the car, she pulls the phone and think of

something to text. She again finds herself in a dilemma to why that young man is attractive to the point that she wants to text him only few minutes after the exchange of numbers. "Maybe we can meet sometime tomorrow?" she texts as the car left Harrods.

"Sure, same place?" I text back.

"Yes, twelve a clock."

"Done."

The following day I choose what I think to be the most attractive clothes I have in my wardrobe. Blue skinny jeans from Primark, Check shirt, black belt, black jacket and black laseless shoes. I arrive an hour early. . My hands in my pockets, I walk inside Harrods, to warm up.

Hessa arrives in her car with her chauffeur. "Shall we sit in that café across the road?," I suggest. "Yes, let's go there."

We sit for three hours. Hessa introduces me to chilli chocolate. It is an acquired taste.

We speak of politics, history, culture and art. Hessa speaks about political correctness and the way it is overdone in the western world. She tells me about her refusal to the male dominant society she lives in back in UAE. She wants to be a free woman, liberal and independent. She cannot get that in a society where men find themselves in charge of women and their protectors.

I open up to her and dig into my intelligence to match her intellect. I speak about the history of the Nazis and how they got into power. I speak about how art is a main driver for society and tell her that everything we do in life is art: the art of speaking being part of it. The three hours pass as if they

are three seconds. We leave and decide to meet the following day, same time, same place. For the whole week we do the same.

“Why do you meet me all the time?” Hessa asks.

“Because, because...I don’t really know.”

“Does my religion matter to you?” Hessa asks, her voice quiet.

“No, plus I know you are a Muslim, from your scarf I guess.”

“Are you a Muslim?”

“I was born one, if there is such a thing.”

“What do you mean, if there is such a thing?”

“Well I don’t think a child is capable of making such a rational decision. I certainly don’t think a baby can. So I don’t know how can someone be born into any religion.” I say.

“It has been a week now since our first meeting, and you have never once mentioned that you want me sexually, nor even hinted at it.. Where I come from, men usually ask for sex in the first hour they meet a woman.”

“I was like that before, but since my education, things have changed.”

“You have also, never asked me about previous men in my life? The last man I knew, we only spoke on the phone and on the first day, he demanded a detailed history of all men I knew: with names, ages, and how sexual the relationships were.” Hessa tells me with eyebrows high, straining against tears.

“Sex is like water and food,” I reply. “Without it, humans would extinct. It should be with consent though. As for your previous relationships,

they do not matter much now. As Buddhist says, ‘past is history, present is mystery and the future is unknown.’”

“Are you saying you don’t sexually fancy me?” Hessa says with a smirk.

“The truth is, yes I do. I leave these things for you to decide.”

Daily, when we meet, customers in the café look at us. They are mostly Arabs from the Gulf region. They look mainly at Hessa, as if to say, ‘we know you are dating this guy.’

“There is something I need to tell you.” Hessa’s facial expressions change as she looks into my eyes.

“What?”

“My family go back to United Arab Emirates in a week.”

“There we go, that’s another reason why we should not develop this relationship.” I interrupt.

“Things happen gradually” Hessa tells me, “we can work on things together and build our future slowly. It will be magnificent life away from everything that keep us away from each other.”

“That is a rosy picture,” I reply with strange look.

“Please, stop being negative, will you?” she snaps, burying my right hand under hers. The warmth of her skin on mine sends a shot of oxygen to my brain. I watch our two hands intertwine.

“I am being logical and sensible.” I say with my free hand pointing a finger towards my head as I leave the right one under hers. “do you really want to

leave your luxury life, your maids, your chauffeurs, your formidable wealth to come and live with me in the poor area of Barking.?"

"Yes."

"Why? What's so special about me?"

"That is something I cannot explain"

"Well, I don't understand!"

"What don't you understand?" Hessa asks me, eyebrows high.

"I don't understand why someone like you could fall for someone like me."

"You keep repeating the same thing."

"Yes, because..." I look down and shut up.

"Listen, your confidence is low. But you have qualities other men don't have, certainly men where I come from don't have. You need to believe in yourself."

Her insistence makes me doubt her even further and think she is an agent with an agenda.

"I am mentally unstable, Do you know that I often think of going to a police station to give myself up as someone about to commit a crime."

"Yes, I know, you told me that before. You told me about your paranoia, you told me about your fear, the medication you take, you think you are fat, hairy and ugly. I know all that."

"Good."

"And I still love you."

“I would be lying if I said I don’t have emotions for you. I do.” Relief floods me as I tell her this, at last. It is the first time ever I confess my love to her. The feeling is indescribable.

“Then admit it, and let us build up your confidence.”

“What will our love be? Love at first sight? We have not known each other long!” I say.

“I don’t care what it will be called, as long as we are together, nothing else matters.”

Hessa’s assurance of her love to me gives me some confidence that I am still someone who others care about.

“Anyway, I have to leave now, as my family are waiting.” Hessa tells me as she looks at her expensive watch.

Hessa leaves me at the café and heads to her posh car outside. In my head, I doubt every word she says about me, my qualities, the most laughable word. I decide to text her, “I do have a feelings for you but I just cannot think of you as someone who will love me. Do you want to meet again tomorrow?”

“Yes,” she replies immediately.

I really want to believe that I can love her and she loves me. this is something I really want to believe I can do and I am capable of but my mind refuses to accept.

On the day before she is due to travel we decide to meet to agree a time to run away together.

“I will wait for you at Victoria station.” I tell Hessa.

“No, wait for me in front of Harrods. I’d like to meet there, in our first meeting place.”

“Ok,” I say with thumb up.

“Have you got a place in mind where would you like to stay?” I ask Hessa.

“As long as it is with you, I don’t mind.”

“I can get a hotel room for the night,” I say hinting at having sex. I cannot remember the last time I had sex. It must have been ages ago.

“Only for one night?! Where will we go after that?” Hessa wonders.

“After that, we will go to my home, it is a very small studio flat, hardly enough for one, but it will fit us.” I reply with fear inside me that Hessa will have a shock when she faces the reality of what she left behind with wealth to be with me in poverty.

“I am excited to see your home” Hessa says.

That increases my anxiety about her being in shock.

We agree and both leave. As usual Hessa takes the posh car with the chauffeur and I take the bus. As soon as I get to my flat. I search the nearest cheap hotel near me and book a room for three nights. With the evening’s arrival I head to the hotel with a bag full of medicine, which I accumulated over the years from my different illnesses. I have arthritis and cholostrol. I grab a bottle of Jack Daniel on the way there.

As soon as I enter the room, I open the bag with medication and start to read the leaflets for each to see which ones are for what illnesses. My heart tells me that Hessa really loves me, but my rational mind tells me she is sent

by MI5 to make me more ill. I think about the freedom of torture I will have if I take my life. There will be no more paranoia, no more worrying about security services, and overall no more mental pain. The medication consists of antidepressants, antipsychotics, sleeping pills and strong painkillers. I open up all the tablets and get them ready in front of me on the table. I pour a full glass of whisky and try to fit over two hundred tablets into my mouth. I fail to do that, so I take each chunk of tablets at a time and eventually swallow them all. I hold my head between my hands, it is a remarkable feeling of pleasure to know that I decide to end my life and not someone else does it for me. Soon I will be asleep, sleep forever and never wake up again to the ugly life I live.

I pull my phone to write Hessa a last message, a final word from me. "I enjoyed every minute I spent with you, I am very happy to have known you and to hang around with you. I cannot cope with my psychotic thoughts anymore, I don't believe you love me, I think you are an agent sent to me by MI5 who control every aspect of my life: my phone, my laptop, my social media accounts, my movement as they watch me by cameras. They even know how I sleep as they have a camera in my flat (but I don't know where it is). Today I make a choice between love and death. I made my choice. I love death more than life. Suicide is too perfect to miss. It erases the past, it demolishes the present and ends the future. That's perfection. I wish you a great life." I send the message and go to bed, cover myself with a blanket and gradually I feel my eyelids get heavier and heavier.

The end