

No Through Road

A curious urge rose up in me since they became our neighbours. Some thing against my nature pushed me to build a relation with them. I didn't experience such a feeling towards any of the many neighbours who came and went before; I didn't even bother to know their names or look close to recognize the colour of their eyes. Why I feel different now? Why I am that obsessed in getting to know them? I don't know! Simply I found myself tailoring opportunities to serve this purpose. Every time I saw her in the backyard, I rushed pretending to be doing something: hanging the washing on the line, checking the growth of the baby plants, changing the directions of the roses that penetrated shyly to their side....

The relationship started pretty normal, a simple good morning, a complaint about the weather, then it stretched to:

Where are you from? Where in Sydney?

And I learned that my neighbours were a husband and wife for more than ten years and that they were living a quiet happy life in a nice small farm in South Australia, and that they moved to this Sydney suburb to follow up the state of being of the sick husband.

- Few years ago Arthur started suffering of high blood pressure (She said) The GP said, this happens very often in his age and he put him on diet and prescribed some pills, but Arthur's blood didn't respond and kept escalating higher and higher. He started losing appetite and thus a big loss of weight
- Did you try alternative medicine (I asked)
- We tried every thing: Herbal, traditional, non traditional, Chinese, the latest known in the health industry, nothing of this worked. (She sighed then continued)
- After a series of medical advices, tests and x-rays of all kinds we learned that Arthur has a kidney failure.
- I heard that this disease is under control
- It is true for some and not for others. It is an unpredictable disease. Lucky ones can live with it for twenty years. Unlucky ones like my Arthur have it fast and their state deteriorates within couple of years.
- I am sorry
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- With Arthur, symptoms appeared very obvious within less than two years: severe headache, loss of weight, shortsightedness, swellings...we did our best. The Kidney Unit in NSW contacted the most advanced Units in the world: Britain, Canada, US ...nothing worked; the tissues were critically damaged

I saw her preparing his tea, walking him with love and patience to the close park, every afternoon, borrowing his books from the local library, exchanging his video movies and accompanying him twice a week to the kidney clinic. I saw in her the ideal wife. I admired her dedication and spread it all over. She became the subject of all my conversations with relatives and friends. I bitched all those who generalize in accusing westerns of being selfish, disloyal and careless. If this is the rule I said, my neighbour is the exception.

Yes!... she might do nag every now and then, but only to take it out of her chest

- I am tired Najma. Do you call this a life? Why this is happening to me? Why I have to carry the entire burden on my own? Why no body cares. He was a good brother and uncle and cousin. None of them thinks of turning back what he gave when he was strong and healthy. That bitch Nancy (his niece) said: put him in a nursing home. Can you trust a man in this condition to a nursing home? Is this fair Najma?

Yes! She did say such things, but in whisper and after looking over her shoulders many times to make sure that nothing reaches his ears.

- Only plantation can rescue him (She added) but plantation is not just a word. Let alone the expenses and the sufferings during and after the operation, still we have to wait for the appropriate donor
- Doesn't he have any relatives who may donate?
- Yes he has. I contacted all of them: Brother, uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews, and niece, even his ruthless sister who bitches all over about me for no reason. Most of them turned me down in a very rude way. His brother said: Yes! You can have my kidney after I die. Can you afford my kidney; it worth millions said his cousin Fred. His other cousin shook me in the shoulders and yelled: How dare you ask you bitch. Whom do you think he is? The last fucker in the world? What do you want to prove Mother Teresa! The only uncle who responded was at his seventies and his tissues didn't match

- He is on the waiting list now (she added). You know how frustrating to be on the waiting list. Can you imagine how many people are there? As if every second one in this country wants a kidney.

I saw her lose vitality and turn pale day after day

_ Don't take it too hard on you dear (I might say). Arthur needs you strong. You should slow down and take care of your wellbeing.
Her answer would be, a bend of the head and a wiry sad smile

I became deeply involved in this tragedy. Arthur and Trish occupied my mind. I sensed their pain drop by drop and lived their sufferings in all its minutes. They were the only story in my conversation, friends and relatives started to laugh behind my back. Their pain penetrated me to the extent that I started feeling guilty for being healthy, as if my wellbeing is the result of their misery.

Why don't you donate one of your kidneys Najma? (I asked myself) If we can live normal with one kidney, why we do not save the life of a human being by giving what we have extra? Aren't these extras a test to the depth of our humanity?

That night, when all the family gathered for a special dinner I said in a deep low voice: I am thinking of donating my kidney to Arthur

A storm of anger roared over my head

- Are you mad? What is he to you? A son! A cousin! A brother

- What will people say?
- A lover and we don't now!
- A secret brother may be
- A human being I said. Aren't we all brothers and sisters in humanity?
- You are not free in your body. It is ours as it is yours, yelled my eldest
- Who you think you are? Do you want to play the roll of God and change destinies? Is he the only one of bad luck in this life? Don't you see how many die every day back home? You, generous one, you didn't even donate blood during the Israeli invasion back then in 1982!

It was different. There were plenty of donors back then (I whispered)

What if she turned up tomorrow or the day after to tell me with a voice full of misery and sadness that Arthur died because this world was emptied of mercy? I will feel myself meant with this accusation; I will feel responsible; wasn't I one of this merciless world?

I became nervous, short tempered and irrational. I decided to escape and play forgetting. I dropped all my curtains down to prevent any possible glance towards them; I avoided going down to the backyard, I even pretended not seeing her when she waves her hand in her way back from the park. I physically succeeded in stepping back but my mind and soul stayed there, more attached may be. I found myself thinking of them more, accused more, feeling guilty more

Few weeks latter, she, unexpectedly knocked my door, her eyes were shining with happy tear

- Good news I guess. (She nodded). It was her wide cheerful smile which said before her lips:
- Arthur is going to do the operation very soon. He will not die. We are blessed, we found a donor. A deep "elhamdella" (Thank God) went out of my chest and calmed my soul. I forgot to ask about details. I felt absorbed with peace and tranquillity. That night I didn't see any nightmares.

Few weeks later our neighbour returned from the hospital, tired but more vital, less pale and less grimace on his face. We all were happy for him. My eldest daughter brought a big fresh bunch of flowers and gave him a kiss on the cheek. My youngest son stucked tenth of get well balloons all over the pathway to his door.

All is well that ends well I sobbed. I drew back to my previous life busy cooking and cleaning and nagging about the children and their father.

Few weeks passed without me bother looking their side. Lately I noticed unusual movements around. Many people came and went, police cars stopped in the nearby, cars with plates from different states parked in the driveway and along the kerb facing their house. I didn't dare to ask. I was living inward, silent most of the time, over busying myself in housework

This afternoon, while I was pulling out the garbage bins, a fat middle-aged lady huddled towards me. I tried to ignore here, but she insisted to draw my attention

- Did you know (she said)

I pretended not hearing. She insisted and repeated her statement louder this time I turned my head to face her.

- Did you know about Arthur?
- Yes I know. He had a successful operation
- You are right; the operation was successful, but the poor one has died
- What? Unbelievable
- Arthur committed suicide. They found him dead on a bench at the park

My eyes went wide, my tongue freezed and I was unable to ask about the details. The lady volunteered to explain, with a voice full of resentment and revenge she said:

It was all her fault. She wanted a divorce.

Sydney Australia
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