

An Arab Woman Blues

Have you ever felt numb? Like a paralytic numbness?

I put the receiver down, stared at the wall, beyond the wall and saw yet another wall, and more walls...Unable to move, unable to take a step forward, a step back. I was stuck in that spot for what seemed to be forever.

I felt the warmth of the cigarette, its heat, getting closer to my fingertips, almost burning me. I guess the thought of being burnt took me out of this trance like state...that state of being walled in.

Some of you may recall that I already have 2 relatives who had been kidnapped and are now imprisoned in "Detention centers".Kamel, 60 plus, is still in American "custody". He is sick and we have no news except that he is still alive...at least we hope so.

Omar, 19 years old, also detained by the Americans. Seems he has been transferred from American hands in Baghdad and moved to Southern Iraq. When we enquired about him, they said that he is in a military hospital getting treatment in Southern Iraq.

That is very strange indeed. Bear in mind that Southern Iraq prisons are run by the sectarian militias from Iran and neither them nor the Americans actually provide any medical treatments in "hospitals".

How long will he be there? What is he suffering from? Is it possible to visit him? None provides us with any answers I personally believe that Omar is dead. I believe that Omar has been killed. Possibly under torture...most probably under torture.

A few weeks back, Salam, another relative was kidnapped and badly battered, bashed up. I have already relayed her story in my previous post "Scream Quietly".

A few days ago, it was Raouf's turn. Now Raouf is very close family.

I chose to call him Raouf because Raouf in Arabic means "kind spirited, gentle..."And Raouf is both. Raouf is a very gentle soul. A soft spoken man, who cared about poetry, philosophy, arts, animals, the land...which he cultivated with great care and love.

Yes Raouf is a very loving person. Early 50's, handsome, eloquent and very kind.

When a great aunt passed away, Raouf inherited a little plot of land. He was not a materialistic person. He contended himself with the little money that this piece of soil gave him. He reared on it birds, chicken and a few fruit crops and lived off its revenue.

Raouf lived outside of Baghdad, about one hour's drive from the capital. When things got very rough there, we suggested he moved to Baghdad. Another relative lent him a temporary roof where he could stay with his wife. He has two grown up kids who have just finished medical school.

Raouf comes from a very well known family. Well known in the sense that his lineage is made of learned men. In fact his forefathers all the way down, were the first to institutionalize the first Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology school in 13th century Baghdad.

Raouf was getting restless in Baghdad. He missed and worried about his birds, chicken, trees and flowers. "Who will feed them, who will water them?" he would exclaim. "I cannot abandon them. I am going just for the day" ... And he left.

He arrived home and to his plot of land. A few hours later, a knock on the door. He opened. Familiar faces from the district. Three armed men. "Salam aleikom" he said. "Wa aleikom" they replied.

Then, they blindfolded him, handcuffed him and shoved him in a car. His ordeal had started. His torture odyssey was about to unfold ...

He was held for three full days and three full nights. He was tortured NON-STOP for three full days and three full nights.

They used iron rods, chains, rubber hose, sticks... Sometimes the three pounded him in unison. Sometimes they would take turns.

The only respite he had is when they stopped for "prayers"!!!!

Again, the interrogation, the senseless interrogation. "What have I done" he would scream. "We found an empty can of beer next to your house door - why are you not growing a beard - why are you not wearing a long "thob" ... and they would pound him some more. But fortunately they did stop for prayers and did not have drills!

- Ok how much ? he said
- 100'000 Dollars.
- Impossible. None of us have this amount.
- Who is us?
- Well, me, my family in Baghdad.
- Who is your family in Baghdad ?
- There is x, y, z and Layla A. Some lent me their house.
- So you are rich all of you.
- No, they just lent me an empty house. We are all unemployed.
- Sell the house and the plot of land.

They dialled a real estate agent. Raouf talked to him and begged him to find a buyer for the house and the land.

"Impossible" replied the agent, "none is buying."

The "pious" armed men lost patience. So Raouf, tell us how would you like to die? Beheading? Have you throat slit? or a few bullets in your head? You choose ...

Raouf's wife showed remarkable courage. She was in constant contact with the "pious" armed men. She would talk to them, patiently with the voice of reason. Sometimes begging, pleading. Sometimes reminding them of their common neighborhood, people they both knew , maybe a neighbor, a distant relative, a school, a teacher, a grocer ... Anyone, any name, any face that could be used as a bridge back to life.

His wife reminded me the way Shehrazade recounted endless tales to Shahrayar the king from the Tales of the 1001 nights. Thus delaying and preventing her beheading. Except Raouf's wife tales was to prevent her husband's beheading...

She must have struck a chord somewhere in their collective memory. They dropped him on the 4th day, in the middle of the night, on some dark street...Raouf carried his wounds and his broken body and walked for miles before he could get any help at all.

And us, for three days and nights we would roam the rooms like animals in a cage, pacing back and forth...Praying, crying, bargaining, pleading, supplicating, begging, God, the Universe, the Darkness, the Silence, the Walls....

When Raouf finally arrived to Baghdad, the whole family went to visit him. A sight that could not be described in words. Raouf was so badly tortured, he was unrecognizable. You cannot see his eyes anymore. His face, his nose are so swollen, as if about to explode with pain and hurt.

His body, his body, the marks of a thousand rods, chains, sticks on it. His legs, his back, his chest, his arms, his stomach... His white shirt was dark brown with blood.

Someone took pictures. For the memory, for the record, for the family album. An Iraqi family album. Even though, I am certain that Raouf will never need pictures to remember. I know his character and his predisposition. I am sure these marks will stay with him forever...

It is a miracle he did not die from the torture. He has hypertension and a kidney condition. He could have easily died from a brain hemorrhage due to the beatings, or from kidney failure or from a cardiac arrest.

It is a miracle they let him go in exchange for nothing because there is nothing to give.
It is a miracle they did not kill him.
It is a miracle they did not drill him...

Look at us. See what a grateful, humble people we have become. We are grateful that our loved ones are tortured but not killed or drilled or have their eyes pulled out. See what an obedient, grateful people we have become...You must be so happy at our docility now.

But Raouf died on the inside...I know it.

His voice was barely audible...He would speak and then his voice would gently fade away and his lips would stop moving.

"It hurts to breathe" he says. "It really hurts to breathe."

Then he manages another sentence, that he keeps repeating like some sacred mantra.

" I will crawl on all four to the border. Am willing to beg or become a street sweeper in Damascus. But I will not stay here anymore. This is no longer my country." And his voice disappears again.

"Take the pictures" shouted another one. "Show it to the UN. Show it to the World...Take the pictures with you."

Take the pictures like you take a postcard and show it to others. Share it with others. A postcard from Iraq.

After the visit, some took turns to vomit, physically vomit, the sadistic, vicious, cruelty that Raouf had to endure.

Raouf is beyond recognition, a reflection of what has become of Iraq - Beyond recognition.

I reflected later on the "purpose" of it all. Why did they do what they did?

And now I am absolutely convinced that these armed men, so called "Al Qaeda", them along with the cars bombs, with the sectarian militias and their torture centers and their drills...are paid, trained and ordered by an American - Mossad - Iranian consortium to apply Bremer's policy: " Let us bring them down to 5 million."

A deliberate policy to empty the country by terrorizing all of us . I am certain of that.

And I say to these hyenas.

Have it all. Take it all. Swallow it. Gulp it down. Gob it up. And choke and die on it.

Take Iraq. Take it all.

This is no longer our country.

Mother said " May God guide them ".

Auntie Sameera said : " Umm Layla, are you crazy ? Why do you pray for their guidance"

To which Mother replied : " So maybe they will turn their attention elsewhere, away from us and forget about us..."

Yes take it all and forget about us.

So when some bastard writes to me calling me a "negative, whining, drama queen" because I am not using my "talents" to "uplift" the arrogant western minds into "Forgiveness and Beauty" - Notice how the occupier asks the occupied to uplift him/her!

I offer this postcard from Iraq instead of my usual "whining". It does have a "positive" side to it. Raouf is still alive but a very broken man who is willing to become a street sweeper or a beggar in Damascus rather than stay one more minute in "Free" Iraq.

Yes take it all and forget about us. Just forget us...and let us breathe a little. For it hurts to breathe, really hurts to breathe in Iraq.

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