

The swift shower

By

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Carla entered the bed room and saw her daughter still lying down. She yanked the thick green curtain shut and said: “Jouman, you are wasting time. The manager firmly asked us not to use the hot water after five. You should hurry. I don’t understand your behaviour.” She went to the desk grumbling, tidied up the magazines, the books, the makeup units and some jewellery that were spread every where.

“Mum I can’t believe these strict rules; we have to eat their crap cooking at a specific time, have scant showers at specific time, trapped in this room that I have to share with my sisters and have nothing to do other than read books or watch TV through one set that Dad controls the viewing.”

Jouman heaved the book she had in hand on the flowered bed cover. Stood up and snatched the last drawer to take out clean underwear.

Sighing Carla said “Take it easy Jouman. How many times do we have to discuss this issue? We should feel grateful that we do have this small hotel apartment when many other families are stacked in one hotel room or even in a school classroom.”

With a denouncing look to her mother Jouman took off her trousers and said “okay mum. Please don’t start your lecture. I know all that. I understand we were lucky to find this place when we ran away from Beirut. I know we have air-

conditioning when others are suffering from the heat. I just want this bloody war to stop so we can go back home.”

She slammed the door of the bathroom, then opened it again pulled her head from the side and stared at her mum and said “don’t worry I will be quick. Relax I learned the regulation. Only four minutes of running water because we want every one in this shit building to be able to use the water per Mr. I don’t know his name’s instruction. She banged on the door and closed it again.

Unspoken, Carla felt her eyes burning. She glanced at the mirror in front of her and saw her tears running. I want to go home more than you darling and I hope we will have a home to go back to it she thought and put her hand on her cheeks and wiped the silent tears. Looking again she didn’t recognise her face. It has been two weeks since she had a good sleep and put on any makeup. This face is for another (her) who is restless praying with all other Lebanese for this terrible war to end and have enough strength to survive the circumstances of the Israeli missiles that struck every where and drove most families to leave their homes and find somewhere to escape the danger..

Jouman’s loud voice interrupts her thoughts “I will open now the water you can start your chronometer.”

Carla clutched her head trying to stop her headache. She threw her tired body on the bed and looked at her watch thinking is she really counting the minutes on her daughter’s shower? All the freedom her daughters enjoyed is prohibited now. Jouman is right.

She could absorb their frustration, understand her husband’s aggravation but who would comfort her? She was putting a lot of effort to gulp down her frustration. And retrieve her patience.

From the other room she heard the TV sound lowered down and Sara talking to her sister “Nour, for God’s sake stop spending your time in front of this dim-witted screen or holding this book. I told you to come with me to join the youth group of the village.”

The sound of TV turned up again.

“Give me this remote control or put the sound down and answer me. Don’t be like always a piece of dead meat”.

Her voice pitch went higher “Nour don’t drive me crazy. Just say something”.

The TV sound went off.

“Nour, we can’t stay away of what is happening in our country. We are old enough to have a reaction. We can’t fight then let us do something useful.”

The TV went on then immediately off again.

“Nour, we have to be together to convince mum. I can’t stand these days full of stress and we are sitting here doing nothing.”

“Sara, you regard me as dead meat. Fine! I think you are just crazy. What you think you are doing with your youth club?”

“At least we are discussing what to do and how to be of any use and you can join us and enrich our plans with your ideas.”

“You deride me?”

Carla sensed a coming fight, she should move but her heavy body was not moving.

“Why you say so. I really mean it”.

“Any way, Sara, I don’t care if you mean it or not. I hate what is happening around us. I don’t want to be part of any thing. I don’t believe any leader any more including your youth group leader.”

With higher voice Nour continued “Can you confirm to me that your decision to collect the fruits is really for a good cause.”

“You are my younger sister and you should trust my judgement. Then what will we loose if we go to help them collect the fruits? It is anyway something to do when we are bored out of our brain”

“You are talking as if you were ten years older than me. You are just two years older and they are not enough to make you much wiser. Then you said he is distributing these fruits to all families in need. How you know he is not selling it and making money on your back.”

“You are always a naysayer and intractable. You bond to your believe and your books and never accept discussion.”

A loud sound of the book being dropped on the floor made Carla want to rise up and hurry to stop the fight. But her legs were iced down and her tired body wouldn't respond.

The main door opened and she could hear Tony shouting “Girls your voices are heard loud. What is the problem again?”

“Dad, don't you think the decision we took yesterday in the youth club to go and collect the fruits before they die on the trees is a good one and would help a lot of people?”

“Calm down Sara. We discussed that and I allowed you to go. Why are you opening the subject again? I will talk to your mum and convince her”

“Dad, Nour is so stubborn and she doesn't want to join us. Isn't it better than sitting home useless?”

“Sara you don't teach me what is useful or useless. You do what you think is good and I do what I believe.”

“Shut up both of you” a strong bang on the table pushed Carla to run out but her legs are caught somehow and she can’t release them. I should hurry. Without me they will go wild she thought.

To her surprise she heard Tony speaking gently “Girls, since when do we argue this way? Remember what mum taught all of us when we used to have wild arguments. We are all tensed. We are going through a very tough period. And that does not give us the right to shout at each other.”

“Sorry dad, she started this. She annoyed me with her continuous refusal. I want her to move and do something.

“Sara, you expect to convince her by shouting at her?”

“You know her silence dad. We could come to a conclusion if she argued with me but she kept silent until I went crazy and shouted”

“Nour, why don’t you want to go with her?”

“Did I ever complain from staying in? I don’t want to go any were. I don’t want to be part of any thing. Just let her leave me alone.”

She recognised Nour’s sobbing but thought they better solve the problem together since her husband is being prudent. He always accused her that she never allowed him to deal with the girls. Now let him perform his parental share since he is not travelling and not busy.

“Nour” heard him calling her “darling, crying is never a solution come and sit next to me”

She can’t believe her ears. Her husband being so sensible to the girls and he suffers all the war stress. He used to be with less stress and always claimed not having the patience to deal with them calmly.

“Can you explain to me why you don’t want to go with your sister?”

“Because, I am not sure why they are doing it.”

“Don’t you feel sorry for the fruits dieing on the trees and no one is collecting them and making use of them? You know that there is not enough workers to do this important job so what harm will do if the youth helped the situation. Whether they do it for charity or not is their problem. They will be judged but definitely not by us.”

“But I don’t know any of them”

“You don’t, because you never come with me when we meet in the school’s playground every afternoon.” Sara raised her voice again.

“Sara, take it easy on her” said Tony then addressed Nour “I think going with them will do you good. It is an outing and then collecting the fruits is so enjoyable. I remember when I had to do it for my grand father in the old days.”

“And she will meet every one, dad.”

Carla was astonished by the tone of the discussion, wished that this relation continue for ever though she is not happy with the idea of her daughters going to the fruit precincts. What if any thing happened while they are gone? What if Jouman hears the plan and want to join them. The war forced her to over worry.

“Nour, you know what!” she heard Tony excited, “What if I go with you?”

“Really Dad you would go with us? This would be an exciting experience”.

“I will go then Dad” Said Nour.

“I am coming with you, no way you for you to go without me” shouted Carla when she felt a soft hand caressing her cheek. She opened her eyes to see Jouman in front of her rapped with her towel.

“Mum, were you dreaming?”

“Me? What? Dreaming?”

“I assumed that when I saw the expressions of your face. Was it a horror movie?”

Carla pulled her daughter towards her to hug her and release her tense with feeling her very close saying “yes, yes, I am scared protect me.”

Sara opened the door of the bed room and said “Mum, There should be something we can do in this isolated place. We agreed in the youth club yesterday that we should come today with suggestions and ideas.”

Carla smiled at her and waved to her to approach and sit next to her thinking should she tell them about the dream?

Collecting the fruits was it a good idea? Should she tell them about it?

Sara sat next to her mum enjoying a warm hug while Jouman is choosing which t-shirt to put on.

“Mum did you wash my green t-shirt?”

“Are you serious Jouman? Can you be more sensible and more mature what matters which t-shirt you wear?”

Jouman made some styles with her lips to tease her sister and said “I suggest learning the Lebanese traditional dance (dakbe) then when the war finishes we do a proper celebration.”

Sara stood up and said “Jouman, stop thinking like a child you are about to be thirteen. We said to do something useful.”

“Take it easy girls. Were is Nour, lets go all out in the veranda and think loud together. I am sure we can come up with something good.”

“To the veranda?” said both?

“Nour, come quickly we are allowed to sit in the veranda.”