



Immature

By

Fateme Ostad Abdolhamid

-Dad-

My gaze glides over her bony neck and jaw, rising from the brown curls at the back of her head to the short, loose strands of black hair that hang effortlessly between her broad cheekbones and jawline.

She swallows and her jaw clenches. I lose myself in the outline of her lips. Thin, elongated lips and milk-white teeth, each with a millimeter of space between them. A fleeting smile graces her lips and throws me into the embrace of her sparkling brown eyes, each with a story to tell. No matter how wide her smile is, her melancholy eyes are unaffected.

Medium-sized eyes, accentuated with a layer of eyeliner, behind black rectangular glasses that stand out menacingly...

She tilts her head...

And the loose brown strands fall over her broad forehead. I stop at her short, square eyebrows. The even brown eyebrows, half of which she has recently cut away mischievously, give her face a quirky and playful expression.

I take a step back and stare at her bony, elongated face hidden under wheat-colored skin. My gaze wanders over her broad shoulders and the area of her immature breasts, which are almost lost in the firmness of her muscular body. I step back from God's masterpiece because I don't want to be just an observer of quality; I want to survey the whole picture.

Her slim waist and tall stature set her apart from her peers. This feature makes her a robust element, with one of her key characteristics being that she always stands out in group photos...

She laughs, takes the change and runs off. She leaves my grocery store and joins her group of friends. I smile and stay in my seat. There are still pleasures that can instantly annihilate your subconscious...

Like the pleasure of marveling at an incomparable, immature masterpiece...

- Son -

The fur of the fucking cat always ends up in my eyes. But they are so thin that as soon as they detach from its body, they become practically invisible. I widen my gaze in front of the bathroom mirror and try to spot any trace of the hair. The damn thing has disappeared. I turn on the tap and wet a toothpick. With my right hand, I open my eye wider and stick the toothpick into the pink membrane. The sting of the invisible fur is more noticeable than the sharp tip of the toothpick. I move the toothpick left and right. Even if someone only had one eye, they could still see. They could distinguish between a hole and a pit. I don't understand the purpose of all these symmetrical organs. Two eyes, two ears, two hands. Maybe many of these tools and instruments are like the spare tire in the trunk of a car. If you lose one, the other immediately takes its place.

But what is the purpose of that beating muscle in the center of the chest?

The toothpick catches the fur. I pull it out carefully. It's ten centimeters long. Damn cat. I should use a trimmer and shave all the hair off from the roots.

I open the garbage can and throw the toothpick in. Pick up the bronze-handled razor. My brain has been acting scabby lately. The doctor says I need to get rid of all the hair on this hollow skull.

I asked, "All of it?"

He said, "The roots draw strength from the blood flowing in your head."

I said, "But I can't make it through the winter without hair. It's cold. It stings."

He said, "Do you want to find your path or bury your head in the sand?"

I said, "You already know the answer."

The doctor said, "Destroy the roots. All the trouble comes from those roots."

So he prescribed me these blue and orange pills. Slowly, I'm getting rid of all of them. I run the razor over my eyebrows. If I don't shave them, they'll fall into my food. Eventually, their roots will burn, but I don't want to endure them for these remaining days either. Ever since I understood the essence of the matter, their presence on my head feels burdensome.

I wash my face...

-Dad-

Yesterday, the bread doubled. The price of it I mean. For someone like me, who both buys and sells it, the balance remains. But for the people... well, to hell with them! Let them grow their own wheat.

I heat my food on the small camping stove at the back of the grocery store. They've recently introduced something new called noodles. They're just like our macaroni, but you have to dip them in poisoned water. The girl comes in from time to time and buys a few packets of noodles. I bring them especially for her because no one else here needs anything other than bread, eggs and tea. I don't eat that shit either. My wife has been putting bread and cutlets¹ on the rack of my motorcycle every day for fifteen years so that I can take them to the shop. I've never understood why the taste of her cutlets hasn't changed a bit in those fifteen years. Just like her. Fifteen years of sleeping face down on the bed so I can reach her sagging, fleshy hips.

And fuck her dark, deep hole without feeling any pressure around my breathless cock.

My wife suffers from stability, and I suffer from instability. Or maybe not... I suffer from her stability, and she suffers from my instability. But whatever it is, her cutlets still fill me up.

The girl enters the store. The sound of sizzling food can be heard. I have to turn it off. She stands at the counter:

"Do you have any cigarettes? Any kind?"

Surprised, I place a packet of cigarettes on the counter. Wipe my sweaty forehead with my sleeve. The smell of burnt food fills the air. I go to the stove and turn it

¹ In Persian cuisine, cutlets, known as "kotlet, " are made with ground beef or lamb, finely chopped onions, turmeric, saffron, mashed potatoes, and eggs to bind. They are shallow-fried until golden and served hot as a main dish or snack in Iran.

off. The girl takes a cigarette from the pack and lights it with the lighter hanging on the counter.

I say nothing. As always, she doesn't show any expression. She's not even wearing her school uniform. I open the lid of the pot and the smell of cutlets wafts out. I make her a casual offer.

She comes closer, sits down on the floor of the store and says, "I'll have a piece."

A pain grabs me between my legs. I make a sandwich and hand it to her.

She takes a deep drag on the cigarette and bites into the cutlet sandwich.

"Would you like some tea, dear?" I say.

"Sure." She replies.

I leave the shop. Have placed a large steel samovar in front of the store that always has boiling water. Pour two glasses of hot water. Place the glasses on the samovar. Look around. The street is empty. I go to the alley behind the store. Unzip my pants, stick my hand in, and push my damn throbbing cock into my crotch. Zip up and tighten my belt. Head back to the shop. Put the tea and candy rock on the floor in front of her.

"Is something wrong, dear?" I ask.

"Can I use your toilet?" she replies.

She gets up and goes up the shop stairs as if she already knows the toilet is upstairs. I'm shocked. Have wet myself. I'm in pain. That's what's strange. Leaving the shop, I wipe the cold sweat from my forehead. Fresh air always changes a person's mood. I look around. The street is quieter. I turn my head to the sky. The sun stings my eyes. I force open my zipper and pull down my pants. Try to pee on the wall. The damn pain doesn't stop. I pull up my pants. Go to the samovar. Pour some boiling water into a paper cup. I swirl the water around in the cup. The water swirls and forms a whirlpool. A tunnel-like path forms at the bottom of the cup. I stick my finger into the water tunnel. The movement and spinning stop. My skin absorbs the moisture.

I see the black van at the end of the alley. The driver, wearing a black hoodie, is staring at me. He's waiting. I shouldn't keep him waiting. I nod my head in agreement. He nods back.

My heart races.

My finger burns.

My whole body burns.

I pull down the shutters and go inside the grocery store. Go up the stairs to the toilet. Gently open the door. The girl is sitting on the floor, hugging her knees tightly, with her eyes closed. I go next to her and sit on the floor. She looks at me.

"You wanna hurt me?" She murmures.

"What scared you, habibi²?" I reply.

"You..."

"Me?..."

"You are devil... Father of lies..."

"Who told you this?"

"Mom... before she dies..."

"No, my darling... Don't say that... I'm the most trustworthy man in these parts...", I reply. Pause for a moment. Then I continue:

"Tell me what I can do to make you feel better?"

"Tell me a story... Ever since Mom died, no one's told me a story..." she says.

"I'll tell you a story..."

I touch her hand. It's cold and numb.

*"Once upon a time, in a village by the dunes,
Lived a young girl, with eyes like bright moons."*

² Habibi (Arabic: حبيبي) - a term of endearment in Arabic that translates to "my beloved" or "my dear." It is commonly used to address a loved one, friend, or family member warmly and affectionately.

*Her spirit was playful, her laughter a song,
But her life took a turn that felt all wrong."*

Lifting her up, I gently bring her out of the toilet.

*"An old man of wisdom, with charm so grand,
Proposed to her, and extended his hand.
At just ten years old, with dreams so wide,
Her parents agreed, trusting God's guide."*

I Lay her on the floor of the room.

*"For alliances promised, protection and might,
They believed it was fate, divinely right.
Respected, admired as his youthful wife,
She felt like a bird, confined in life."*

The tiled floor is cold. The girl just stares at me.

*"Her wings were clipped, her skies turned gray,
Longing for freedom, for a child's play."*

I gently take off her glasses. Her thick, square eyebrows are revealed.

*"Solace in memories, of laughter and glee,
Echoes of innocence, a distant sea."*

I put my hand on the collar of her trench coat. Unbutton it. Don't know how fast I unbuttoned her coat, but when I realized it, my warm hands were on her cold, immature breasts.

"She was a vision of youth, purity, and innocence..."

Her small pink nipples stared into my eyes. I felt like they were so fragile that they might shatter under the slightest pressure.

"Immature..."

My cock painfully hardened in my pants.

Damn...

My trembling fingers crawled over her soft and sensitive skin...

It was cold...

I felt her pulse under her stomach's skin.

My fingers slid lower.

If the word "beauty" had a special meaning, she would've embodied it.

"Beauty..."

My heart was pounding. I looked at my hands. Blue, protruding veins. Dark, cracked nails. Rough, weathered skin, full of brown spots. In contrast to her vitality, I am nothing but a decayed corpse. In an instant, *senescence*, with its piercing eyes, stares at my entire being. My eyes fill with tears. Senescence smirks. I get off the girl and sit. The girl stares into my eyes. The coldness of her frozen body makes me shiver. I am a stinking swamp gazing at a fresh fruit. I stare at her...

She's calm. It's as if she has no life.

- Son -

I down the glass of milk. My canine tooth is loose. I'm slowly losing the tools to chew meat. The doctor said to avoid all the things that grow.

From that day on, I broke all the flowerpots. Are animals considered plants? When we bury our bodies in the ground, worms grow from the earth and devour us. They plant humans in the soil like seeds, and trees grow. Even if they burn our corpses, we'll return to the earth with next year's rain. What is it about this godforsaken soil that everything takes life from it and returns to it? When we buried my mother in the garden, she became a giant tree. No matter how much my father tried to cut it down, it kept spreading branches and growing. I told him to cut the roots. Everything gets its life from these roots. Cut them and free us. He wouldn't listen. When the hernia pain got to him, he couldn't even cut the stem anymore. Now there's this huge tree in the middle of the yard. Just like mother with her fleshy, plump body. It's not our fault. We had to bury her in the garden. This country has so many dead that cemeteries stretch down several layers into the earth. A filth like the inferno³ Dante promised...

That's why for a few years now, no one is allowed to bury their dead anywhere but their own homes. Houses have become small, hidden cemeteries. Dad says I look at things too darkly; at least we don't pay for burial costs. But I say I don't want to smell the stench of rotting corpses everywhere I go. I don't want towering trees mocking my frail body. I don't want to walk in the shadows of my neighbors' corpses...

I put my notebook and pen in my bag, close it, and sling it over my shoulder. I taste the flavor

My mouth turns bitter...

³ The term "Inferno" originates from the Italian word "[im]'ferno]," meaning 'Hell.' It refers to the first part of Dante Alighieri's 14th-century narrative poem, *The Divine Comedy*. This section depicts Dante's allegorical journey through Hell, guided by the Roman poet Virgil.

Damn tooth...

I stick my finger in my mouth and pull out the tooth. Damn it. All day, my tongue kept hitting the sharp edge of the exposed root, causing a shooting pain. I head toward the shop. When a woman dies, there's a shortage of women for a while. Mother died last year. Since then, I haven't seen any women around. Dad says I'm living in a fantasy world.

He says, "You're as dumb as a rock."

He says if instead of reading books and vomiting other people's leftover thoughts into my stories, I opened my eyes a bit more, by now I would have someone to pour my masculinity into. But I really don't see any pussy around. Last year, a tall, attractive teenage girl used to come to our grocery store, but since Mother's death, I haven't seen her.

I get to the store. Dad has the small camping stove on and is sitting beside it, reading the Quran. Aloud. He reads Ar-Rahman ⁴every day. Next to that stove...

He says the shop is cold, and the stove needs to be on. I tell him we'll end up like Mother, poisoned by gas. He says, better that way. To hell with this shitty life...

I go behind the counter, over the accounts. Our income doesn't match our expenses. Our income is higher. We have no expenses. Dad has been sleeping in the shop for a long time. He says the dry cleaner next door noticed a black van parked outside our shop several nights in a row. Since then, Dad packed up his life and anchored it in the shop. We have no valuables, but breaking the windows for nothing would still be a loss. Now we have a 24/7 shop.

Maybe that's why our income exceeds our expenses.

I light a cigarette and stand in the doorway. The weather has gotten fucking cold. The steam from my breath makes the cigarette smoke look even thicker. I see the girl at the end of the alley opposite.

⁴ In Islamic tradition, Surah Ar-Rahman is often recited upon the death of a person. This chapter from the Quran emphasizes the mercy and blessings of Allah, invoking comfort and peace for the departed soul and solace for those mourning.

"Bismillah⁵", I mutter and scan the surroundings. Go back inside the shop and tell Dad I saw the girl. Dad gives me an angry look and continues reading the damn Quran again. I head out into the street. It's been a year since I last saw her. I run after her. Go up and down the alleys. Can distinguish her laughter among her friends...

The doctor said I should never run so that my skin cells can heal and regenerate better.

But I run. I might lose her. The cold penetrates my bones. Women are like cats. They are all agile and sly. The wind bites my skin, and I have no hair on my head. But I run faster and near the end of a dead-end alley. The girl is nowhere to be seen. But that fucking laughter still echoes. I fall to the ground. Coughing hard, tea spills from my throat onto the alley floor. I vomit on the asphalt. The narrow stream of tea slowly joins the mud in the gutter. I get up. Look around. There's no one. The mayor recently made this street one-way, reducing traffic. No one passes through here anymore. Most of the shop owners packed up and left when they saw how deserted the street had become. Except us and the dry cleaner. Maybe that's why our income exceeds our expenses. If we left, there would be no grocery store around. I see the black van again, parked near dry cleaner's house. Hearing the sound of people reciting blessings, fear grips me. I dread a crowd reciting blessings in unison while walking through corpse-filled alleys. I fear united herds. They carry corpses once again...

⁵ "Bismillah" translates to "In the name of Allah" and is recited by Muslims when they feel scared or anxious. It serves as a reminder of Allah's protection and guidance, seeking His help and blessings in moments of fear.

-Dad-

We haul the dry cleaner's wife, Pari Khanom⁶, through the neighborhood before dumping her in a corner of the yard. Damn the bastard who got us into this mess. A dog should shit on their face. The crowd tags along all the way to her grave. People are always like this – only good for a funeral parade. They're only good for escorting you to the grave. It's as if we tear our own asses apart our entire lives just to have more pallbearers at our funeral. Despite spending her whole life dodging men, Pari Khanom's hips got more action at her funeral than she ever did alive, with everyone rubbing them while sending her off with prayers and well-wishes. I told the dry cleaner to pour acid on her corpse if he didn't want a giant tree growing out of his yard tiles.

He wouldn't listen.

Said "Pari would be uncomfortable".

I doubt Pari Khanom, with her imposing and fleshy figure, knew how to be uncomfortable. Why have all the women become so obese? Wallah⁷ our shoulders are sore. Damn pigs.

I said, "Look at my fate! I've cut the tree branches in my yard so much that my balls ache!"

Dry cleaner said, "I want to sit in her shade."

I said, "You'll be cursing when no sunlight reaches your house!"

He said, "Get lost... fuck off"

He must have had a good wife since he still remembers her fondly after her fucking death. She must have made him more than just cutlets... or maybe she was good

⁶ Khanom- A Persian word meaning Ms. used as a respectful title for women.

⁷ In Arabic, "wallah" (والله) is an expression used to swear by God. It is commonly employed to emphasize the truthfulness or sincerity of a statement, similar to saying "I swear" in English

in bed. By the way... I didn't tell my son to come to Pari's funeral. He'd just start saying bullshit about how all the women disappeared after his mother died. I don't know why my son is always sniffing around women's asses. Fuck the first whore who gave birth to us and made our lives this mess. These god damn women will overpopulate the earth if they don't control their breeding. Plant your seed in their bellies, and they bear children. Bury them in the ground, and they grow trees. They've come to breed, fill up graves, and shit on the taste of life...

We bury Pari in a corner of the dry cleaner's yard. We press the soil down with our feet to flatten it. When it rains, the yard will turn to mud, and the smell of the decomposing corpse will overwhelm us.

I ask him, "Why did your wife die?"

He says, "Pari died of loneliness."

I say, "Don't take it to heart, man. We've all suffered at the hands of these whores. Let them be gone. Sooner or later, they'll all die. Get yourself a new, young chick, and have a blast!"

He punches me square in the mouth. The old bastard has a lot of strength. The people hold him back.

I shout, "Damn you and your slut of a wife's grave."

He tries to attack me, but I stagger away. I head for the street, wiping the blood from my mouth with my hand. I feel the swollen veins in my hand, my wrinkled, ugly skin. I feel a pang of sadness. Old age is devouring me. Rubbing my swollen blue veins against my lips gives me a strange sensation. It's erotic. Like touching the unripe, cold nipple of the girl...

I head towards the grocery store. Climb the stairs and open the closet at the end of the room. I set my chair in front of it. I push aside the women's clothes. A muddy-colored trench coat. A gray coat. Pink shoes. I push them all aside. I look at the small, instant photos stuck to the back wall of the closet. Beautiful naked bodies of them...

I don't know why they look more beautiful in photos...

In reality, I see a bunch of decrepit old hags with milkless breasts. Pigs who died from exhaustion right on these tiles. They gave their lives to me...

So that blood would flow through my blue veins again. I don't want to decompose.

I sit on the chair. Spread my legs. Lift my knitted vest. The white hair on my belly stands up like it's possessed. I unzip my pants. Stare at the photos.

Rub my swollen blue veins against my belly...

AAAAHHH...

I think of Pari...

Look at her pale face in the photo in front of me...
to her spread laps and her dark, furry cunt...

While her wide and lifeless eyes stare at my face.

And her old and colorless ass rubbed on the mosaic of my room...

"Poor Pari... you tried your best to hide your treasure from me...", I mutter.

- Son -

Yesterday, I went out on the street, and there were pictures of Pari Khanom everywhere. It was confirmed that Pari Khanom was dead. Why have they all suddenly died? I swear there's a famine. Why does no one suspect the deaths?

I was talking to the doctor.

He said, "The hair loss is progressing well. Keep it up, and you'll get rid of every last one of them."

I said, "I want to get rid of all my attachments."

He said, "You've chosen a hard path."

I said, "I don't want to be bothered by biting my nails or brushing my teeth. I don't know what's wrong with me. But everything bothers me. I'm sick of everything that grows. Hair, nails, teeth, people, women!"

He said, "Your problem is that the fish has slipped out of your hands."

I said, "You're speaking in riddles, damn it!"

He said, "Don't look for her. She's gone for good."

I said, "But I saw the girl. Laughing and running in front of the grocery store."

He said, "Forget about her. By now, someone stronger than you has probably had his way with her. They're all the same. They want a strong rival, and when they find one, they turn their asses to you and go off to enjoy themselves."

I felt a lump in my throat...

He said, "Didn't you say you wanted to be free of attachments? Don't cry. Think!"

I said, "Doctor, there are no women left. The city is infested."

He said, "Watch your brain doesn't get infested... damn all women."

I head towards the store. On the way, I see a crowd carrying several corpses on their shoulders. Fat, fleshy corpses. Like my mother. I shout, "They've all been killed."

The people charge at me.

I say, "Did I kill them?"

They say, "Shut up, you animal."

I crawl towards the wall. The people, like frantic horses, hit themselves and wail, carrying the corpses to their homes. It takes five men to carry each corpse. I don't know why all the women have reached a common size. Bulky and bloated figures. I head into the store. I go to my father. He's reciting the Quran.

I say, "Dad, the city reeks of Ar-rahman! (death). Stop it."

He says, "That's why I'm reciting Ar-rahman..."

I go behind the counter. Press my head between my hands. My tears drip onto the pack of cigarettes in front of me. I want to wail out loud. Miss my mother. Infestation has taken over all our lives. Dad puts a cup of tea with rock candy on the counter in front of me.

"Drink, you got scared."

"I'm nauseous."

"It's the smell of the corpses. Shrouds have become expensive. No one buys them anymore. Everyone gets buried in their own clothes."

"They bury everyone in their own clothes, they'll bury me in yours!"

"Don't make excuses. Drink your tea and organize the goods."

I take a sip of tea. The places where I've pulled out my teeth burn. I put a cigarette in the corner of my mouth. I pick up the lighter and light it. With the first puff, the smoke goes deep into my bones. It's because of the wounds where my teeth used

to be. The doctor didn't give me any anesthetic, so I could feel the pain. Fuck the doctor. Dad sits next to me. He strokes my bald head and says he's craving cutlets. I say, so am I.

And we both crave cutlets.

They carry corpses past the store. They don't bake halva ⁸anymore. All deaths are now considered normal. Dad brings his Quran to the counter and opens it. He raises my finger and places it on the Quran. I pull my hand away.

He says, "Read with me." I don't.

I get up and head towards the upstairs bathroom. A rotten smell comes from there. I slowly enter the room. I'm stunned. I see the cat, tied by its paws to the four corners of the room. Its belly is ripped open, spilling its guts onto the floor. Its anus is torn, and its intestines are hanging out. The walls are covered with pictures of the cat...

I vomit. Spew the contents of my stomach onto the cat's corpse and its pictures...

I feel the heavy presence of someone behind me. It's my father.

He pushes me towards the closet at the end of the room. He opens it. I see the trench coat and shoes of the girl. The same ones she was wearing the last time I saw her...

He quietly says in my ear, "Hush..."

He moves the clothes aside. The wooden back wall of the closet is covered with photos of corpses I somewhat recognize...

My mother...

Pari Khanom...

The girl...

My heart is about to leap out of my chest. I run away. Rush down the stairs. Run towards the street. Blend in with the crowd. People start spitting in my face. They

⁸ A traditional vegan dessert made of fried flour and rose water syrup. In Iranian culture, halva is traditionally served at funerals as a sweet treat, symbolizing hospitality and condolences. Its presence reflects the cultural importance of food in providing comfort to mourners.

push me to the ground. I don't understand why they're acting this way. They kick my sides. Curse at me. My mouth fills with blood. I see my father standing in the store's doorway, holding his Quran, shaking his head in disapproval.

Dad says, "Skin him alive, the bastard..."

The dry cleaner shouts, "Murderer..."

Suddenly, I hear the sound of glass shattering from the store's upper floor. A chair is thrown out the window and lands in the street. I look around. There are no women. The dry cleaner approaches with a large blade. I scream.

No one is going to help. Not even my father. I don't see dad. He has vanished. Damn it. Two people try to forcibly pull my pants off. The dry cleaner approaches with a blade. I scream louder.

Someone shouts:

"Cut his balls off so he can't make a fuss anymore."

"Nasty old lecher."

They've grabbed my hands and feet. I look at my hands. Slowly, brown spots appear on my skin. My veins swell and turn blue. Wrinkle. Grow rough. White hairs sprout on my body. A sharp pain shoots between my legs. People are raining punches and kicks on me. I see my reflection in the store window. Old age has swallowed my youth. How much I look like my father now, in the same clothes.

I become engrossed in the filth and decay of old age on my face.

Looking at my reflection in the store window, I say, "I knew they'd bury me in your clothes..."

And with the final blow to my head, I fall silent.

The end.