

The Caretaker
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The Caretaker

By

Mohammed Ben-Aharon

Place and Timing is a hand in glove cosmic compass. Only the epicenter needs to be figured out, and the rest can be settled in truce.

From the window next to his shoulder he waited to establish his covenant with the earthen reality outside, but there drove in no messiah of the much awaited breeze of the country that was usually voluptuous and mouthful, as inside he sat akin a forgotten cucumber in the refrigerator hopelessly on the wheelchair – cold and wrinkled.

“His hormones are manipulating him. I'd leave his mind to God, now.” The experienced doctor had laid claims calmly on a rainy night, roughly a year ago.

As how, before death, fart makes its excuse to be heard one last time, the old man made his excuse to touch himself one last time and one last time, and the son foxed no grapevines about it, thinking it would all end at one fine final moment of grace superseding the horrendous battalion of awkwardness the senior without mercy or distinction put the junior through, endlessly. Taming control on his father's upper limbs that grieved in notoriety was beyond the sorry compunction of his son's understanding.

At once, within three months of being diagnosed, son put the old man in a stone room. A bird's eye scope from his place. It was a clean room built in thick, broad and wide blocks of stone in the service room of an old, abandoned lighthouse. Junior had bought the lighthouse in an auction at a throwaway price, because long before it could serve its purpose of guiding ships, it was rumoured to have killed two people in the parable phrases – ‘the shit's haunted’.

When the property was brought under hammer, none had turned up and only junior had made the proposal to buy it. The bulb in the lantern room to date was not tested. Junior considered the pros and cons of buying such a property gift-wrapped with such claim. But when medical hopes had died in his father's body, perusing paranormal dilemmas in a lighthouse was of the least appreciation to Junior.

X

Where his father was set in to, in the lighthouse, only few objects of immediate necessities were spared to be around. Diversity could not fancy being an appealing option to senior.

A piece of paper reminded the senior of disturbing adult novels he had read when he was a teenager, mirrors gave him the idea that he was doing himself and he liked it wild, and if transistors were around, all he could hear was women neck deep in their plasma of orgasm, driving him to hear the purest and the most organic sounds of love. His ready to order delusions made him sweat in the stagnant cabinet of his parliament on wheels like an athlete in a well conditioned sauna. This is when me, or as how the old man fondly babbled *The Sweatslayer* will step in and sow his wet, perspiring palpitations on rapidly eager networks right in their prime and pristine mommies. All the children and grandchildren senior's endocrine illness begetted feared me; only me. Because I stood by the senior and slayed them all; one by one . . . but . . . but always made sure senior was safe, no matter how deadly I was to be at times to kill the clients of symptoms his peculiar malady had inevitably sought to do business with.

X

"What I do with my father is my business alone. Not yours." Junior roared at his wife. His wife had found out that his father was not living in another continent as how her husband had made her to believe.

Though handsomely eligible, junior had to remain unmarried, for his father. Three months after senior was diagnosed, when junior could no longer handle his father's smut gestures at the maids who tended to his *servant* needs, he decided to put him in the lighthouse. Seventeen years have gone by since then.

"Don't you think he'll feel bad that his only son has put him there? Alone?" His wife tried to kiss his butt on cheek with a gloss of conscience.

"He is not alright in his head!" Junior poked and gagged at his own temple on right. "He doesn't even know am married!" Junior reasoned. "Besides why are you concerned?"

"Concerned? He is your father. In the end, he is your father. A curse from a father will always remain." Junior's wife was firm on her agenda of thought.

"He does not even remember me."

"If you tried."

"Stay out of it; it is an order. You understand?" He seethed as his finger warned her.

She slapped his finger and spoke through her teeth. "No!"

X

As if the cheery pay she received from junior to take care of his father wasn't enough, the maid was also heavily moonlit in receiving wicked sums from his wife – and all that was expected of her was to hand over the keys to the lighthouse to her second employer (boss' wife), when demanded, and more so to strictly maintain confidence of this underground dealing from her base employer.

Junior's wife saw nothing wrong in his father. Yes, he was old and weak. Apart from that legitimate biological degradation, senior seemed alright to her.

"Your son is a kind man," cleaning his table, "he means only good for you" Junior's wife had said last afternoon. "We just want you to be alright."

Since she was here instead of the maid, junior's wife cleaned him, fed him and patted his body dry after sponging him with lukewarm water.

Senior seemed indifferent to her rhetorics. He knew. He knew what loving wives did. To back their husbands. He wasn't all dead inside like how others thought he was.

Past two times she was here . . . she had made the same statement, *for* her husband. A little different with words here and there, but then again, all the same.

"Abba?" she announced just as she was about to set foot out of the door. "Your granddaughter is here. It is her vacation. She will be coming to see you tomorrow." Junior's wife clapped in excitement to lighten her father-in-law's mood a little. It helped. He smiled. She couldn't determine if it was a smile, but certainly better than what she had seen of him.

She shut the door after her.

X

Until yesterday, Junior's daughter was numbed of her father's father's existence.

Today, she would open the door to his light of message with the key her mother would give her, and come to understand clearly that what her father had been telling her was a lie; a lie she could not empathise for what, and more significantly 'why'. What was so grave about her grandfather that her father had to lie about his whereabouts? It beat her wonder.

Junior's daughter pledged no sweat in finding the place. Even aliens could spot lighthouses. Only this one was quoted in the palates of solitude, with its neighbourhood obsessively punctuated in complete vacancy.

X

The iron door creaked. She stepped in. Senior's eyes greeted junior's daughter. Not with a welcome, but with a *who the hell are you*.

"Grampa?" Junior's daughter gushed. She could barely hear herself. She was excited and confused. She was seeing the man who was responsible for making the man who was in turn responsible for making her. For senior, it was the sperm of his sperm.

“Grampa!” This season her sound was more assuring. It was true. She was finally here, though in the prose of reconciliation that in apparenacy was piously adverse to the solemnity of her father’s narrations so far - of her grandfather’s existence.

Carefully, she walked to him, as if senior were some newfound species.

We call her ‘Vas’. Senior recalled his son’s wife telling him that, the second time she had met him.

His *who the hell are you* countenance transformed to *there you are; I have been waiting for you.*

“Vas?” He insecurely spoke.

“You have been told!” Just then she kissed his hand.

Senior quaked under the theatre of his skin.

Vas’ hair was reverently glossy and lustrous. It could give the most expensive pearl in the world a deep complex to sulk in. Playing volleyball for school had cultivate her skin to a covetous tan and aligned her body in the right proportions baptising her femininity in the right upbringing.

“You look so much better than in the pictures, grampa. You are more handsome now.”

“Vas?” He repeated, wanting to be addressed. Not to be nusted. But to be merely *addressed*.

“You know” she smiled excitedly, and lifted his trembling hand to her lips for another peck. “They call me that, because when I was a kid I used to rub *Vaseline* all over my hair for no reason.” She laughed thinking about how stupid she had been as a kid. “Mom sent this for you - sweet corn and chilli prawns. She told me you like this” and placed the lunch containers on the table by his chair.

Vas started to fan her face with her hand. There was no paper around where the fanning would have enhanced.

“It is so hot, grampa!”

Air outside the window next to his chair was still as an Egyptian in its tomb.

Nothing moved, save for Vas’ chafe.

Finally seeing me, she stepped forward passing her grandfather by a step. I kissed her all over the face. She parted her hair and showed me the scalp. Her swelling bosoms of sweat were punched back right in to their troves.

I realised. Senior is not alone. He has a family. He ain’t cold and forgotten afterall.

Felt better to know he had people visiting him, after his son had approximately abandoned him.

X

While she had allowed me to caress her hair, Vas blinked rapidly at her grandfather's hand on her chest. His hand was slipped in to the envelope of her tee from the neck.

Paralysed in shock, she'd still maintained her body in bow toward me.

There was a reason why I stood behind the senior. He knew he could always count on me, and even I knew he could count on me to what he counted on me for.

I cannot now, on that note, allow his granddaughter to have an ill opinion of him. Not when her mother, only now and not to forget the only family member who came to visit senior.

So I decided to do what I do best.

When people change, certain important histories are superannuated. Like how 'thou' became 'you', eventually. If Vas changed, what senior did unto her will be of little significance. Trust me.

By the time the *why* of her father's discretion in keeping the whereabouts of her grandfather an obscurity had hatched the frogs in her ken of empathy, I seized her from the wonderland of reality.

My four limbs, in sheer aluminium pulled her hair through the protective metal braces and aggressively spun like a mad man for 208 revolutions in 5 seconds before I choked to a sabbatical with the blood from her twisted scalp splattered all over my face. I don't think she can be called Vas anymore. I don't think she can be called anything anymore. What will you call a person without a face? Or one whose face is peeled away from the head.

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