Oblivion

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Every day at dawn I wake up. I am a primary school teacher in this very neighborhood, and out of habit, I wake up early in the mornings and say my prayers of gratitude behind the window of my room. I see nothing new except Tehran, that same smog-filled, usual city that has set up a production line of sorrow within itself and sometimes startles us with the sound of an explosion. How strange that I am accustomed to seeing this repetitive view behind the window! The cawing of the crows is not pleasant to me. How ugly the spring season is this year. I draw the curtain of the room. In the house, there is no sound except the tick-tock of the clock.

I go to the kitchen towards my mother's bed. "Mom, get up, your prayer time is passing." My mother got up from her bed and went to the bathroom. While performing her ablutions, she said: "Parisa, dear! You should have been married by now, taking care of your husband and child. I can't stop thinking about your destiny and you being left alone. What was wrong with Mr. Mojtaba that you didn't accept?! Maybe I don't have much time left to live." Tears gathered in my eyes. I

tried not to let her see the lump in my throat. I quickly prepared breakfast, drank a cup of tea, put on my uniform to go to school, and said to my mother, who was praying: "Take your pills on time and correctly after breakfast. I'll be back at noon like every day." I wanted to say something else, but then I remembered: my mother is dead. This is how I lived my mother every day after her death.

I went towards my bed. It was Thursday. I lay down, reviewing the memories of the last year when my mother was alive. One day from the last month of my life with my mother comes to mind and plays out in my head.

I was setting the breakfast table. "Mom! What are these things you're saying early in the morning? It's not too late. I'm only thirty-three years old."

My mother, in the middle of her morning prayers, would say: "I am sick and I am afraid you will sacrifice your life for me."

I was adjusting my head covering. My mother, with a rosary in her hand, reciting prayers, said: "You are young, Parisa, why do you forget things already! Last night at eleven o'clock, the television announced that schools are closed tomorrow due to air pollution."

I froze right there as I remembered. Yes, even though the school's deputy, Mrs. Heidari, had sent me a message, I still hadn't remembered.

I went back to my room, changed my clothes, and told my mother, "Mom, I'll cook chicken for you again today."

No, I'm sick of chicken. I have soaked and cooked chickpeas and beans in the freezer, I'll take" them out and cook a delicious soup for you."

Mom! Please use fewer legumes. I've stuck the list of foods you are allowed to consume on the" fridge, please follow it and don't put meat in the soup, your diet must be strictly followed."

I waited for my mother's answer. I forgot again that she is dead. I pricked up my ears; nothing came except the hum of the fridge. The fridge on which the list of her allowed foods is still stuck, even after more than a year since her death. And I still, whenever I go to the neighborhood park

and see any petite woman wearing a crepe chador, I walk towards her and stare. I don't know .why my brain forgets that she's gone, or maybe it just can't accept it

Zahra, my mother, had cancer. The doctors had removed her left kidney two years before her death in a difficult surgery, and as prescribed, she had undergone several heavy courses of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She had a long, curved scar on the left side of her abdomen that stretched to her flank, and that suture line was the wound in my own heart, visible on my mother's body. When I held my mother's fingertips, I felt connected to life. When her beautiful green eyes smiled, my life lit up. When I asked her to talk about my father, despite her pale complexion and frail body, I could clearly see the love in her eyes. My mother was from Kermanshah. After marrying my father, she had lived in Tehran since her youth. They had a good life together, but from the time I was nine, when we heard the tragic news of my father's fatal accident, we were always afraid of the doorbell ringing. We were tired of the whole world and the .news it brought. We never forgot the bitterness of that day and feared life without him

I grew up under the affectionate shadow of my mother and with the help of my grandfather. When I was accepted into Farhangian University, the grief of my father's death had faded somewhat for me. I was a teacher now. Just when I was ready to give my heart to a man, my mother fell ill, and I decided to become her dedicated nurse. I chose not to give my heart to any man, spending all my energy on my mother's recovery and my job. For two years, I took care of her as best as I could. Until one Friday noon, while lounging on the worn-out sofa at home with her, I felt her hands and face were severely swollen; she was struggling to breathe and was in a lot of pain. I immediately called the ambulance. With their help, we transferred her to the hospital. From behind the glass, I saw her breaths passing through the oxygen tubes in the silence of the ICU. She could no longer speak. My eighty-year-old grandfather, who had always helped us through life's hardships, had rushed from Kermanshah to Tehran along with my uncle. I wanted to give this news to my mother. With great difficulty, I got permission from the nurse and the doctor on duty to see her up close. I wore the special visiting gown and went to her side. I took her hands. The touch of her hands calmed my restless spirit a little. Of all my mother, only this sick and frail body remained. Her eyes were open. I stared into her beautiful green eyes. A tear rolled from the corner of her eye down her face. Why can I never remember the sound of a heartfelt laugh from her! I opened my mouth to tell her that her father was on his way, when the monitor lost its steady rhythm, and the nurses pushed me out of the ICU. My mother's life was over. She was

.freed. She never grew old; she was only fifty-seven

Yet the love a mother instills in her child's heart does not simply vanish. Perhaps this love is the reason I forget every day that she is dead. Every day I repeat these words to myself. Even when I am dictating to the kids at school, I whisper "my mother is dead" to myself between sentences. But when the recess bell rings, I try calling her, and every day her phone is off. I don't know why I can't remember that she's gone. Maybe this is the brain's final act of compassion for someone in mourning; it refuses to remember that their loved one is buried under the earth. The brain doesn't allow love to be abruptly deleted from the neural pathways. Love simply shifts from a past memory into a dream of presence. Although in my waking hours I forget that my mother is dead, when I dream of her, I remember it. But I can't bring myself to tell her she is dead, for fear of breaking her heart in the dream. In my dreams, she is not sick; her hair is thick and beautiful, her eyes smile, her flank bears no stitches, and she eats whatever she desires—free from any kidney .protein diet

Finally, I overcome the noise in my head and the flood of memories. I go to the kitchen and eat a light breakfast. I listen to the tick-tock of the clock until the loud ring of my mobile phone makes me jump. I answer. It was Mrs. Heidari, the school's deputy, with whom I had developed a close friendship over the years. She says to me: "Come over to our house for an afternoon snack. Since the schools have been closed for a long time due to the war, it's a good opportunity to see each other and break the loneliness." All I knew about her life was that she lived with her sick, elderly mother. All our previous meetings had been either at school, on field trips, or at the park next to the school. Although I was hesitant, after much insistence, I accepted her invitation .because I truly needed a companion who could understand me

I got ready in the afternoon, bought a box of sweets, and headed to their house for the first time. They lived in our neighborhood. When I got out of the taxi, house number one was right in front of me. I walked towards the old door and rang the bell. The door opened, and I entered a small courtyard. The house was tiny and old, but charming. Mrs. Heidari welcomed me with a warm smile. After the customary greetings, the first thing that caught my attention was her mother, lounging on the sofa. I placed the sweets on the table, walked towards her mother, reached out my hand, and said hello. She frowned and, in a bad temper, muttered words under her breath that I couldn't quite understand. Mrs. Heidari said: "My mother has Alzheimer's. Please don't be

".offended, she has forgotten her words and doesn't even recognize me

Oh! May God help you. You had mentioned your mom was sick, but I didn't know her condition" "...was like this

In the mornings when I am at school, my two married sisters take turns being here to care for" her. I also have a brother who, because of his wife, doesn't even dare to call and ask how she is "...doing. He has truly forgotten he has a sick mother

Oh, how cruel! How can they bear to do that? I suppose it's a blessing then that your mother" doesn't remember anything. The world has become such that there are few beautiful things left to "!remember anyway

Mrs. Heidari nodded in agreement. "Let me go brew some tea; it will go perfectly with these delicious sweets you brought." She went towards the kitchen. I glanced at her mother. The old woman was staring at the bowl of cherries, her mouth watering. I realized she wanted to say something to her daughter but had lost the words. I understood she wanted cherries. I took a few from the bowl, placed them on a plate, removed their pits, walked over, and handed her the plate. She looked at the cherries but couldn't remember what to do with them. I gently placed one in her mouth. A sweet smile spread across her wrinkled face. Her cotton-like hair fell messily over her .forehead. A sharp smell of urine reached my nose. I pulled back and returned to my seat

A sudden realization sparked in my mind: What if my mother hadn't gotten cancer and hadn't left so early? What if, instead of fifty-seven, she had turned eighty? What if she had grown old, developed Alzheimer's, and no longer recognized me? What then? What if she craved cherries ?and couldn't tell me

I was lost in these thoughts when Mrs. Heidari said, "Parisa, dear! If you don't mind, excuse me ".while I go change my mother's diaper

".Please, go right ahead"

I stood up and went into the other room. The sound of her mother swearing and shouting "Let me go!" was echoing when the sound of an explosion shook the air. Mrs. Heidari called out, "I'm done, come into the hallway, it's safer here. I think they hit the police station nearby, the blast ".was close

I, who upon witnessing the condition of Mrs. Heidari's mother had finally stepped out of the mourning for my own, achieving a sense of stability, peace, and acceptance, emerged from the room and said, "Most likely. This neighborhood doesn't have any other targets left. It's actually good my mom isn't here to see these things. If she had seen this, later when schools reopened, every time I got ready for work she would remember the staff and kids of Minab school and worry. And we, whose lives revolve around the school, will never forget them for all eternity."

I picked up my phone to send a positive reply to Mr. Mojtaba's invitation for a café visit tomorrow. It was finally time for me to stop mourning.