

Ola Abdalkafor

Morphine and Bullets

My name is Leila and my age is twenty. I am beautiful, young but ill. Since I discovered my cancer, I have only thought of life and people in terms of health and illness. How I wonder why people are quarrelling all over the world when the utmost desire of some others is only enjoying a few moments of good health. My country is like me; cancer is destroying her body cell by cell so mercilessly and I am one of her cells, feeling only my pain, not hers.

Since fighting reached our doorstep, I have imprisoned myself, listening silently to my mother complaining to my father—both shivering with cold—

“We are hungry, we are thirsty and we are cold. We need what relieves Leila. We need electricity. We need our life back. Isn’t it enough that Hayat and her baby returned to us slaughtered in a box?”

They both cry and hold each other’s hands. They look at me and see that I’m not with them. They are imagining the moment when I will follow my sister because this moment is certainly coming.

As for me, I do not care about what is happening outside and I do not want to know who is fighting who because I am in severe pain and I only want my morphine injection.

My mother enters my room. I am wrapped in my prayer clothes and reading my Quran.

“Leila! Majed shot his brother, Imad, after a mad political argument; they are supporting two different groups, you know.” My mother says. “I can’t believe it! What is this war doing to people? They are shedding their own blood?” She continues.

She looks at me—perhaps waiting for my reaction, but I give her nothing except the gaze. I remain silent repressing my pain. She clears her throat and says:

“They will bring Imad inside soaking in blood. Don’t be panicked.”

I prefer not to see this and leave the room to the kitchen shaking and only thinking of my injection when, suddenly, my father announces his

arrival by his terrible coughs. Look at him; he's too tired, freezing and too old. He is heartbroken. He sees me passing to the kitchen.

"Leila! How are you my darling?"

What a silly question! He knows that I am not well and that pain is stabbing me a million times every day, but it seems that today he has nothing to offer but this question. I can see he has no injection in any of his hands. Together, father and daughter, we enter the kitchen—which is utterly void of food.

"You couldn't pass the military barriers today, is that right, dad?" I say despairingly.

Bitter tears force their way out of his brown eyes silently. Looking at me in the face humiliated and helpless, I can see it in the little light of my candle. Yes, I can see the marks of his being beaten violently.

I shut my mouth up but I am sure he can read my silence:

~~What will we do then, dad? I am dying thousands of times every day. Why doesn't my Creator take my soul and relieve me?~~

I think of the soldiers who are dying every day and I really envy them. How lucky! One bullet and they die! And while I am entertaining myself with these thoughts, my father walks out of the kitchen cursing the days, the war and the rulers of this world. When he opens the door, I hear Imad's careful moaning. How I wish to sing my pain loudly, but I must silence it or my parents will die of sadness.

A few minutes have passed. My father enters the kitchen abruptly.

"The doctor who came to treat Imad has accepted to get us a morphine injection for a sum of money. I will give him my last savings, alright?"

Two hours have elapsed. My father comes in again happy with the injection. He kisses me tenderly assuring me he loves me and asking me to forgive him for his inability to do more to relieve me.

O, my precious morphine, my sight is being blurred, my body is becoming nimble, my mind is going somewhere else, and I hear the voices as if from under the sea. My pain is fading and I am sl....eeeeee...piing.

I wake up. The household is dead silent. It is very unusual. My greatest phobia comes back to me: have we been attacked and they killed everybody leaving me for sexual pleasure? I open the door vigilantly.

I peep out and what I see is my father's body hanging from the ceiling fan. All others are tearlessly shocked. They have already cried blood over Hayat's corpse in the box. I am sure their tears turned into stones unable to leave their eyes. But I cry madly for the first time since the war started.

O, father, you were a religious man—praying, fasting, forgiving, kind to others and honest—and now you died as an unreligious man; you didn't wait for your Creator to take your soul. Now, no one will do the funeral prayers for you. It is all because of the bullets of a war that have stopped our life and took Hayat, but it is also because of the morphine which you knew you'd not be able to bring me anymore.

You left us no message showing sadness, apologies, anger or even regret, but why should you? Isn't it enough that you left a weak, helpless and exhausted corpse? That is not meaningless at all.

Leaving everybody busy with this new corpse, I open the door and walk out deciding to roam the streets and bid my loved city farewell before my cancer eats me completely. After my dad's departure, I am fearless. He would have killed himself if he had lost another daughter of his—another seed of life. But now he hanged himself anyway. My mother wouldn't kill herself because she still has my baby-sister, Banah, to protect—*IF* she could.

Now, watch me walking bare-footed through the city.

I see stones.

I see bullets on the pavements.

I see blood on the walls.

Loud voices!

Soldiers laughing,

Women wailing,

Elderly moaning,

And children panicked!

How haven't I seen this before? How haven't I heard of the new musical trend: shooting and shelling? And of new fragrance trademarks—blood and rottenness? The Morphine has really done its job all the previous months. All my senses have been absent. I haven't felt anything. But now I can feel the pain, the sadness, the cold and the horror. Yet, I go on walking.

Where am I now? It seems I've reached the military barriers. Who are these soldiers? And who are those soldiers over there? And the others over there? Different uniforms! Different flags! Who of them could be my enemies?

I hear the sound of bullets, I feel them penetrating my body. Another invasion of my poor body! Am I viewing blood torrents on my dress or am I hallucinating? Did they shoot at me or at one another? Am I finally falling dead?

How fantastic this feeling is! You suddenly get all the relief in the world.

Yes, the soldiers finally gave me the—perhaps ten—bullets of mercy; ha, ha, ha! Let them practise their shooting skills and have their fun. At least, after this war stopped my treatment, it can relieve my pain by its bullets. This war has become merciful finally! And it is ridding the world of the burden of helpless people like me by decreasing population numbers in unnecessary spots on this earth.

Long live humanity's higher interest and prosperity!

I fall into a box that happens to be beside me.

See you in the afterlife—or probably—some of you believe they will never ever see me.

From my country, and despite everything, I say *Salam*.