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A Piece of Shroud

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The other day I saw a poor lady
Wiping a floor with her baby
Tied to her chest. The baby
Languished and wept in sobs.
She moaned with anguish,
But beside her was the shadow
Of her master.

She was in dire need of coins
To buy bread, and was sunk in grief
As her child clung to her breasts.
Such scenes are often a part
Of our shadowed muffled lives.
We often deny these scenes our gaze.
The child was dehydrated and sick.

The shadow of her master lengthened.
He snored. She toiled at a hectic pace
To drown out child's incessant sobs.
He could hardly hold his sobs
And his breath slowly ebbed away.
The mother, before she knew it,
Had lost her child. She shrieked with pain.

Silence echoed in her bones.
The shadow had darkened.
Her master gave her a piece of shroud
In the form of her earnings.
She held on to her child, close to her chest.
It was time for her to let go of her baby.
She screamed clatters of dying screams

But all rebounded to her with heavy
Hearts. None had the courage to look back
Straight into her eyes.

Aghast was the moment
And silent were its shadowy lanes.
Humanity wept in sobs to shed its shame.

Bio:

Pramod Rastogi is an Emeritus Professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland. He is a Member of the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences. He is the 2014 recipient of the SPIE Dennis Gabor Award. He is a Fellow of the Society of Photographic Instrumentation Engineers (SPIE), a Fellow of the Optical Society of America (OSA), and a Distinguished Fellow of the Optical Society of India (OSI). He was Editor-in-chief of the international journal of Optics and Lasers in Engineering (Elsevier) between 1999 and 2019. He was an honorary Professor at the IIT Delhi between 2000 and 2004. He was a guest Professor at the IIT Gandhinagar between 2019 and 2023. He is presently an honorary adjunct Professor at the IIT Jammu.