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Mother

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The city of shownpur woke up that day with dreadful news. The usual cheery, good mornings and smiles were wiped out of everyone's face. Every news channel is filled with blurry pictures of a fifteen-year-old girl covered in her blood, naked as the day she was born. The radios and news channels kept on ranting about the gruesome image of the innocent flower cold and gone in the abandoned land. That day, the entire nation wept for the poor soul, begging for her soul to forget everything and be happy in heaven if the concept of the afterlife was true.

"Rosie, our innocent flower, we are sorry for the pain you had to undergo; we are sorry for your unheard cry for help. Please be happy in heaven. We promise to bring you justice."

The news of Rosie being abused physically and sexually didn't come as a surprise, but it was still disgusting to hear and hard to comprehend. Fear ignited the minds of mothers thinking about their young daughters.

Rosie too, was the daughter of someone. Marie is a single mother. After losing her husband, she had no hope to live until she learned she was pregnant. It was hard to make ends meet, but she managed. She made a promise to herself as well as to her little flower that she would look after her well and would grant her happiness. Now the broken mother wept, cursing at the monster who destroyed her child.

Rosie was given the name "Flower" by Marie when she was not yet born. The expectant mother called her child Flower, the symbol of joy and pleasure because that was exactly what the baby was to Marie—her new hope, her reason for smiling. Now that poor mother only had tears left, and hence, she cried, breaking the hearts of everyone who heard her cries. And they could not blame her for the curses that left her mouth, the foul words she called her daughter's abusers.

The stormy weather was nothing in front of the tears of the mother, who was on a hunger strike in front of the police station. The reason for this is clear from the pluck cards she was

holding and the banter she tied in front of the small tent she created. All she asks for is justice, though all she seeks is revenge to avenge the murder of her daughter.

Even after two days, there was no proper news of evidence found, and the investigation was nowhere near finding the dirty murder rapist. All that came out was how cruelly Flower was tortured, and that too in detail.

It was a sunny day. Despite it being monsoon season, the sun shone brightly. Marie was not seen in her usual spot in front of the tent. Curious, Ramya, a rookie policewoman, stepped inside the tent. Seeing the limp body of Marie, she checked if the woman was breathing by putting her finger under their nose. What a relief! She is alive. Ramya, still with quivering hands, called for an ambulance. And by that, all hell broke loose.

Protests broke out throughout the city. The crowd chanted for the investigation to be done properly and for the monster to be brought to light.

"How are we supposed to live peacefully knowing a demon is walking freely in here?"

"Do we have to live the rest of our lives scared for the lives of our daughters?"

"Doesn't Flower and her mother deserve justice?"

"Shame on you, officers. If you can't even bring out a murderer, how can you protect us all?"

Questions, acquisitions, and defaming sentences raised before the police were clearly showing the disappointment the people felt towards the police.

Sofia is once again back at the police. She remembers vividly when she was here before. It was ages ago when she lost her little boy, John. She has a vague memory of what happened after. John was a teenager in his sweet sixteen when he disappeared first from home. There was a party thrown to celebrate his birthday as his wish, but the decoration on the cake was not as he envisioned, which made him mad and run away from home. The police found him after a day trying to board a train. The next time she was here was to file a missing case of John again, but since it had not been twenty-four hours since he went missing yet, she was sent back home. The third time she was here was after twenty-four hours. That time, she was able to file the complaint.

Sofia cherishes John a lot. Being a single mother, she went through hell and back to ensure he had a nice life ahead. It is her own fault he is spoiled. She won't deny that. Every time she stepped through the gates of the police station, she had hope within her, but now she is here again with no hope. She is not here to ask about the well going of the investigation of her missing son. In fact, she wishes he never returns. Get caught by the police? She needs that, but his return? She dreads that.

Sofia sneaks a glance at Marie who is protesting again. She knows very well the pain Marie must be in. Well, maybe not fully. She would never know the pain of losing a daughter in such a way, but she can imagine how bad it must be. She feels her chest tightening as if she can't breathe. She is torn between the motherly love and the rage of a mother.

Clutching tightly to the package, she marched towards the first police officer she saw.

"I think I know the culprit of Flower case."

silence. A pin-drop silence ensnared the station.

"What do you mean?" inquired Ramya.

Sofia, with trembling hands, extended the package towards Ramya. Her eyes filled with tears, but also Ramya could see the determination in her eyes along with something else that she couldn't pinpoint.

The package's contents surely astonished every person in the office. There are photographs of Rosie at the school compound, at a shop buying things, and walking through the bridge that is near her house. It was clear that these pictures were taken through stalking. Moreover, there is a poorly drawn map of her way towards school, tuition, and home.

"I found it today in John's room while cleaning. I had no idea I raised the monster in this town. I am sorry." Sofia's voice reached their ears. Ramya holds her as her knees buckle, still chanting sorry.

"Find John Thomas fast." Someone was giving out orders. Sofia just wished it was all a nightmare.

Sofia went straight to Marie.

"I am sorry," she said, and walked away without turning back, leaving Marie all confused.

The city of Shownpur woke up the next day hearing the news of the culprit being caught.

"Twenty-seven-year-old John Thomas was caught by the Shownpur police while he was hiding. The culprit is being investigated currently. So far he said he acted upon his lust and desires."

Stones and profanities greeted John. Not a single soul looked at him with sympathy, not even his own mother. His face was stoic. He does not look guilty, nor does he look ashamed. Not even his eyes were giving out his true emotion.

In front of the tent, Sofia stood, hugging Marie. Both their eyes were fixed on John; both mothers wept—one for her dead daughter and the other for her as good as a dead son. Both mothers mourning the loss of their children.

"I am sorry," Marie whispered.

"No," Sofia said, shaking her head. "I am sorry."

Ramya came to them with sympathy filled eyes.

"It all ends now," Ramya said with a sigh.

"No," came the reply from Sofia. "It will only end when the monster is dead, not just caught." she continued to speak with a trembling voice. "I hope he rots in jail and then dies painfully," she stuttered out.

John is her son, but she too is a mother. She couldn't pretend to not see the pain and exhaustion in Marie's eyes. And a mother knows what is best for her child.

Third-person Biographical Note:

Arya VK was born in Mahe, Puducherry, in 2003. She recently completed her BA in English from Mahatma Gandhi Govt. Arts College, Mahe. She is planning to do her MA. Arya loves to read and write. One of her works (story) was published before in ‘The Criterion’.