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Happiness: A Hoax

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I cradled the tiny, delicate form in my arms, his weight a whisper against my chest. My heart swelled with a warmth I had never known, a feeling so pure it threatened to overflow. Finally, after years of yearning and prayers that felt like they were swallowed by the void, I held my son in my arms. His skin was soft, the color of fresh cream, and his eyes, when he opened them, were the deep, dark brown of the earth after a rain. I wonder at him, at his perfection, at the miracle of his existence.

Yet, as I looked up, the room around me was steeped in an unnatural stillness. My husband, Kharaj, stood by the bed, his face cast in shadow. There was no joy in his eyes, no relief in the lines of his mouth. He watched us with a gaze that was cold, distant, and for a fleeting moment, I feared that something was terribly wrong. I looked at my mother-in-law, expecting the usual beaming smile, the affectionate pat on the back, but she too was silent. Her lips were a thin line, her eyes hard as she stared at the bundle in my arms. My sister-in-law, normally so full of chatter, stood off to the side, her hands clasped tightly, her knuckles white. Confusion tugged at the edges of my mind, threatening to pull me under. This was supposed to be a moment of celebration, the culmination of our deepest desires, and yet, all I felt was an oppressive weight as if the room itself was closing in on me. "Why do you all look pale?" I whispered, my voice trembling, desperate to break the suffocating silence. "This is our child, the one we've waited for... why aren't you happy?" No one answered.

The silence stretched on, a cold, empty void that swallowed my words whole. The baby stirred in my arms, a small, innocent movement that felt like a lifeline in the darkness. I clung to him, seeking comfort in the only thing that seemed real in that moment. Kharaj finally spoke, his voice low and devoid of any warmth. "Our son... he's..." He trailed off, and I felt the ground beneath me shift, my heart pounding in my chest. "What is it?" I demanded, my voice rising in pitch. "What's wrong with him?" Our son," he began again, his eyes locking with mine, "he's deaf." The word hung in the air between us, sharp and unforgiving. Deaf. The syllable cut through the air like a blade, slicing through the fragile fabric of my happiness. I stared at him, uncomprehending, the meaning of his words refusing to take root in my mind. "No," I

whispered, shaking my head. "No, that can't be. He's perfect. Look at him! he's perfect!" I looked down at my son, at his tiny face, so serene, so peaceful, and I felt a deep, primal scream building inside me. The room began to spin, the walls closing in as the reality of what Kharaj had said began to sink in. My son, my beautiful, perfect son, was trapped in a world of silence, cut off from the symphony of life that I had so desperately wanted to share with him. I could not control the trembling in my hands as I held him tighter as if I could shield him from the truth that had been thrust upon us. The weight of it crushed me, the realization that my child would never hear my voice, never hear the lullabies I had hummed to him in the womb, never know the sound of laughter or the whisper of the wind through the trees. A sob tore from my throat, raw and aching, as I looked at my husband, pleading with him to tell me it wasn't true. But his eyes were empty, devoid of the light I had once known. And then my mother-in-law spoke, her voice cold and sharp as steel. "He's cursed," she said, her words like venom. "A punishment for your sins. You've brought this upon us. "I recoiled as if struck, her words slamming into me with the force of a blow. "No," I choked out, tears streaming down my face. "No, he's not cursed. He's our son... he's our son..." But she turned away, her dismissal of me as final as a death sentence. My sister-in-law's eyes were wide with pity, her lips pressed into a thin line as she glanced at her brother. "Kharaj... you can't let destroy life. You need to think about your future. "Her words were laced with implication, dark and foreboding. I stared at her, my mind reeling. What was she saying? What did she mean?

But the answer was already there, lurking in the shadows of the room, in the silence that had swallowed my joy. They didn't want him. They didn't want a child who would never hear their voices, who would never be able to speak back. They didn't want the burden of raising a son who was different, who was broken in their eyes. And then, the final blow fell.

"Kharaj," my sister-in-law said quietly, "You should consider taking another wife. One who can give you a healthy child." The words knocked the breath from my lungs, a cold, searing pain shooting through my chest. I looked at Kharaj, waiting for him to refute her, to tell her that our son was enough, that I was enough. But he said nothing. His silence was a betrayal, a confirmation of my deepest fears.

"No," I whispered, my voice breaking. "No, you can't... you can't do this to us..." But they didn't hear me. They had already turned away, their minds made up. My mother-in-law's face was set in stone, my sister-in-law's eyes hard with resolve. And Kharaj... my husband... the man who had once promised me the world, stood silent, his gaze fixed on the floor. The

world shattered around me, the pieces of my broken heart-shattering at my feet. I clutched my son to my chest, his tiny heartbeat the only thing anchoring me to reality. My vision blurred with tears, my body trembling with the force of my grief. How could this be happening? How could the miracle I had longed for turn into a nightmare? I screamed a sound of pure, unfiltered anguish that seemed to echo through the very fabric of my being. It was a scream that came from the deepest part of my soul, a cry to the heavens for mercy, for understanding, for some kind of reprieve from the cruelty of this world.

And then, suddenly, the dream shattered. The scream faded, the darkness lifted, and I found myself sitting up in bed, drenched in sweat, my heart racing as if I had been running for miles. The room was still, the only sound the quiet hum of the fan overhead. Kharaj was beside me, his hand on my shoulder, his brow furrowed in concern. "What happened?" he asked, his voice soft, but laced with worry. "Why were you crying in your sleep?"

It took a moment for the reality of the situation to settle in, for the remnants of the dream to fade away. My hands were empty. No child, no weight in my arms. I was alone, the sheets tangled around me, the night still heavy with the remnants of my fear. I turned to him, my breath hitching as I tried to find the words. "I... I had a dream," I whispered, my voice shaky. "Our baby... he was..." But the words caught in my throat, too painful to say aloud, too fresh in my mind. Kharaj's hand tightened on my shoulder, his eyes softening with understanding. He pulled me into his arms, his embrace warm and solid, grounding me in the present. "It was just a dream," he murmured into my hair, his voice a balm to my frayed nerves. "Just a dream."

I nodded, my face buried in his chest, the tears still fresh on my cheeks. But even as I clung to him, the echoes of the dream lingered in the corners of my mind, a shadow that I couldn't quite shake. The fear, the loss, the heartbreak, it was all too real, too raw. And somewhere, deep inside, I couldn't help but wonder if it was a premonition, a glimpse into a future I wasn't ready to face. The thought chilled me to the bone, and I closed my eyes, willing the darkness to take me once more, to grant me the peace that had eluded me for so long. But sleep would not come easily that night. Instead, I lay awake in Kharaj's arms, listening to the steady beat of his heart, counting the seconds, the minutes, the hours, as they ticked away into the night.

The night stretched endlessly before me, an unyielding void that refused to grant me the solace of sleep. My eyes were heavy, but my mind raced with thoughts too tangled to

untwist. I had given up on counting the hours, the minutes, the seconds, time had become meaningless in the darkness. With a sigh, I adjusted the earphones in my ears, letting the soft, melancholic strains of music wash over me. The singer's voice crooned with a sorrow that mirrored my own: "Why are my dreams always like this, why does my heart break over and over again?" I closed my eyes, though I knew sleep would not come. It never did, not easily, not without a fight. I had been battling insomnia for as long as I could remember, ever since I was a child. Back then, sleep was an unwelcome guest, arriving unbidden and at the most inconvenient times. I had fought to stay awake, to join my parents in watching the late-night news or the popular TV serial. But sleep, shameless and unrelenting, always claimed me before the first commercial break. Now, as an adult, the tables had turned. Sleep eluded me with cruelty I could not fathom, slipping through my grasp whenever I reached for it. The nights were long, filled with the deafening silence of my own thoughts. The ticking of the clock was my only companion, a constant reminder of the hours slipping away, lost forever to the darkness.

Today had been a difficult day, the kind that left an imprint on your soul long after the sun had set. Shahina, my domestic worker, had arrived early in the morning, her face pale and her eyes swollen from crying. She moved through the house like a shadow, her usual lively chatter replaced by a heavy, suffocating silence. I had sensed something was wrong the moment she walked through the door, but I waited for her to speak, knowing she would eventually. It wasn't long before the truth came spilling out. Shahina's husband, Ratan Mia, had come home late last night, reeking of another woman's perfume. When she confronted him, he had stared back at her with cold, indifferent eyes, no explanation, no apology. She had known then, without a doubt, that Ratan Mia was involved with someone else. It wasn't the first time, and it wouldn't be the last. But what hurt her most was not his infidelity; it was his complete disregard for her feelings, his refusal to even acknowledge her pain. As I listened to her story, I felt a pang of sorrow, not just for her but for myself as well. Shahina's life was a relentless cycle of suffering, a never-ending battle to provide for her daughter, Moyna, while enduring the abuse and neglect of a husband who no longer cared. And yet, despite everything, Shahina continued to bear children, hoping that each new life might bring some measure of happiness to her broken home.

My husband, Kharaj, was not unlike Ratan Mia. He was distant, indifferent, more concerned with his own life than with mine. We had married with dreams of building a future together, but those dreams had long since faded, replaced by the cold, hard reality of a loveless

marriage. One thing I had longed for more than anything, a child that had remained out of reach. The emptiness in my heart was mirrored by the emptiness of our home, a silence that echoed through the halls and weighed heavily on my soul. Shahina, despite her suffering, found solace in her children. I, however, was left alone in the darkness, yearning for a peace that I could never seem to grasp. Moyna, Shahina's little daughter, was a frequent visitor to my home. A sweet, chubby-cheeked child, she was always eager to play, her laughter ringing through the empty rooms like a melody. I watched her today as she toddled around, her small hands reaching out for the chocolates I kept in the fridge just for her. Her joy was infectious, a bright spark in the otherwise dull monotony of my life. But even as I smiled at her, my heart ached with a longing I could never put into words. Watching Moyna was like peering into a world I could never enter, a world where love was simple, pure, and unconditional. A world where the bond between mother and child was unbreakable, no matter the hardships life threw at them. Shahina's life was far from perfect, but at least she had that. At least she had Moyna.

I envied her, even as I pitied her. Her life was a constant struggle, a never-ending series of challenges and heartaches. But she had something I did not, a reason to keep going, a reason to wake up each morning and face the day. My life, by comparison, felt empty, devoid of purpose. The nights were the worst, stretching endlessly before me like a vast, uncharted ocean. And in that darkness, all my fears and insecurities came rushing in, threatening to drown me. The clock ticked away the minutes, the night slipping away as the first light of dawn began to seep through the curtains. My thoughts were a jumbled mess, a tangled web of past and present, of dreams and reality. I knew that sleep would not come easily tonight, just as it hadn't on so many other nights.

As the day broke, Shahina returned, this time with a fresh bruise on her cheek. The sight of it made my stomach churn with anger and helplessness. I wanted to confront Ratan Mia, to demand that he treat his wife with the respect she deserved. But what could I do? I was powerless in my own home, let alone in someone else's. "Shahina, you can't let him keep doing this to you," I said gently, handing her a cup of tea. She took it with trembling hands, her eyes downcast. "What can I do, Apa?" she whispered, her voice thick with despair. "I have nowhere else to go. If I leave, who will take care of Moyna? Who will feed her?" Her words struck me like a blow. She was trapped, just as I was, in a life that offered no escape. But where I had the luxury of retreating into my sleepless nights, Shahina had no such refuge. Her days were filled with endless toil, her nights with the harsh reality of her husband's betrayal. And yet, she endured it all for the sake of her daughter.

Later, as I lay in bed, the events of the day replayed in my mind. I couldn't stop thinking about Shahina, about the life she led, about the strength she must possess to keep going day after day. I imagined her lying next to Ratan Mia, pretending to sleep while tears streamed down her face. I wondered if she, too, longed for the peace that sleep could bring, if only for a few hours. My marriage was not as violent as Shahina's, but it was no less painful. Kharaj and I had drifted apart over the years, our love eroded by the constant grind of daily life. We had wanted children, but after years of trying, we had given up hope. The doctors had told us it was unlikely, and that knowledge had settled between us like a cold, unmovable barrier.

Our home had become a silent battlefield, each of us retreating to our own corners, nursing our wounds in solitude. The emptiness was palpable, a heavy presence that seemed to grow with each passing day. I had tried to fill the void with work, with hobbies, with anything that might distract me from the gaping hole in my life. But nothing could quell the ache in my heart, the longing for something more.

Shahina, despite her suffering, had found her purpose in her children. I, on the other hand, was left with nothing but the echoes of my own thoughts, reverberating through the darkness. The insomnia that plagued me was both a curse and a comfort. A curse because it robbed me of the peace that sleep might bring, and a comfort because it kept me from facing the emptiness of my days. One night, as the clock ticked towards midnight, I heard voices coming from the kitchen. Quietly, I slipped out of bed and tiptoed down the hallway, my heart pounding in my chest. Shahina and Ratan Mia were arguing, their voices low but tense. I strained to hear, pressing myself against the wall. "You're nothing but a burden," Ratan Mia hissed. "Always crying, always complaining. No wonder I go elsewhere." Shahina's voice was barely audible, but I could hear the pain in it. "I'm your wife, Ratan. I've given you everything, my youth, my body, my love. What more do you want?" "I want peace!" Ratan Mia snapped. "And I'll never get it with you always nagging me. Maybe if you weren't always pregnant, things would be different."

There was a pause, and then I heard the sound of a slap, sharp and brutal. I flinched, bile rising in my throat. I wanted to run into the kitchen, to throw myself between them, to protect Shahina from the man who was supposed to cherish her. But I was frozen in place, my feet rooted to the ground.

I came to the bed and turned on my side, my gaze settling on the outline of Kharaj's face, softened by the dim glow of the moon filtering through the curtains. His features were

relaxed in sleep, his breathing deep and even. He looked peaceful, and content, but I knew better. I knew the shadows that lingered beneath the surface, the silent battles we both fought within the confines of our own minds.

Suddenly, a realization dawned upon me with startling clarity: No one is truly happy on this earth. Happiness, that elusive state we all yearn for, is but a fleeting moment, a brief respite from the constant tug of life's burdens. Happiness was nothing more than a myth, an illusion we chase in vain. For some, happiness is a child in their arms, a family complete. For others, it is the absence of that very same child, the freedom to live unburdened. And then there are those like me, caught in the liminal space between desire and despair, trapped in a world where the absence of what we long for becomes a prison of its own. Shahina, the woman who worked tirelessly in my home, her hands worn and weathered from years of labor. She had children, little ones who clung to her when she came home at night, who looked to her for love and nourishment. But was she happy? No, Shahina was far from it. She was trapped, bound by the very children she had birthed, weighed down by the relentless demands of motherhood. Her eyes spoke of exhaustion, of dreams deferred, of a life that had slipped away from her one diaper, one sleepless night at a time.

And then there was me, with empty arms and a hollow heart, yearning for the very thing that suffocated Shahina. A child, a simple, innocent being who would fill the void within me, who would give my life the meaning I so desperately sought. But even that desire, that unrelenting ache, had become a chain around my soul, binding me to despair that I could not escape.

I was trapped without a child, just as Shahina was trapped with hers. We were two sides of the same coin, forever spinning in a cycle of longing and regret, unable to find peace in the lives we had been dealt. The man who sat in his office late into the night, driven by a need for success that never satisfied his soul. The woman who smiled through the pain of a marriage that had lost its spark, clinging to memories of a love that had faded long ago. The child who watched the world through curious eyes, unaware of the struggles that lay ahead, blissfully ignorant of the disappointments that awaited. We are all trapped in our own ways, bound by the expectations we carry, and by the desires that consume us. We chase after happiness as if it is something to be captured and possessed. But in reality, happiness is as fleeting as a dream, slipping through our fingers just as we think we have grasped it. I realized that perhaps happiness is not a state of being, but a momentary pause in the chaos of life. The world is full

of people, each chasing a dream that might never be fulfilled. But in the end, it is not the fulfillment of those dreams that matters. It is the acceptance of our reality, the understanding that life is a series of fleeting moments, both beautiful and painful, and that true peace comes not from the pursuit of happiness, but from the acceptance of its impermanence.

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Mst Sabrina Moktar Arju is an emerging writer and currently pursuing an MA in English Literature and Cultural Studies at Bangladesh University of Professionals. She completed her BA in English Language and Literature from the same institution. Her research interests span feminist theory, gender dynamics, and psychological aspects of literature. She is passionate about exploring the intersection of literature and social issues. Her work seeks to illuminate gender expression, gender identity, sex and sexuality, existentialism, power, and narrative in contemporary texts.