

The Dangerous Game

Asia sat waiting for her friend Baidah who was coming to visit her. She was surprised at her friend's demand for a private meeting. Asia thought Baidah must have a serious problem, so she was anxious to see her friend, when she arrived a few minutes late. Asia waited for her to start talking while Baidah tried to appear composed.

Then she said, "Can I ask you a question!"

"Yes, with pleasure!" said Asia.

Baidah said, "I want you to answer frankly."

"Now you know I am always frank!" Asia assured her.

"Why did you refuse Foad's proposal of marriage!" burst out Baidah.

Asia was taken aback by the question. She was silent for a while, and said, "Can I also ask you a question!"

"Of course, you can," said Baidah.

"Why do you ask me a question that might upset me? You know he is my relative and I have refused him for certain reasons."

Hesitantly Baidah said, "Well, he has proposed to me. That's why I want to know your reasons for refusing him."

"Oh, I see!" said Asia, and went silent. Then Baidah began to plead with her saying, "I must know. I am your friend, aren't I! Don't you care for me?"

"Yes, you are my friend and I do care for you, so I will tell you the reason. But first of all, what do you know about him?" Asia asked Baidah.

"I know that he is a handsome, gentleman, educated, and well mannered with a good social position."

"That's right," said Asia. "He is also wealthy. But is that enough?"

Baidah, pale faced, murmured, "He is not a committed Muslim !"

"You know this and yet you still ask me my reason for refusing him?"

"I know that religion is very important, but he might change", said Baidah.

"How?" asked Asia.

"Have you ever thought that he might be guided to the right path?" proffered Baidah.

"Is this what you think?" said Asia.

"I think," began Baidah, "that refusing him is a kind of cowardice. I think we can bring Foad and the likes of him back to religion, and that we should strive for that."

"O.K., but how are you going to do it?" Asia said.

"I have means" said Baidah. "Anyway why should I refuse him when he has all these good qualifications?"

If I leave him, he may marry someone who will increase his disregard for religion. If I accept him, I may bring him back to faith."

"That's your opinion" said Asia. "I won't impose mine on you. However, it is a very dangerous game, or marriage at risk."

"Oh, please do not exaggerate so Asia. Marriage is an adventure. I feel I can tolerate the experience."

"You are quite wrong! Experience does not make a fool wise. There is a great difference between marriage to a committed believer who is caring towards his religious duties that protect him from deviation, and a non-committed Muslim, who cares for nothing but earthly pleasures that change with the times."

"It is a risk" said Baidah, "But if I succeed it would be in the best interests of religion."

"You say: 'If I succeed', this 'if' indicates your doubts. Marriage should start on a firm foundation." Asia told her.

Baidah looked down as if in inner conflict. Then she said, "What is your opinion?"

"I don't know what to say" said Asia. "I am afraid you will suffer as a result of such an experience. It is a dangerous game. A husband does not usually accept his wife's opinion and he may even make her

accept his. Then the wife may find herself standing at a crossroad leading either to the failure of her marriage or the loss of her religion. You know both are terribly hard to tolerate."

Asia stopped for a while and waited for Baidah to speak.

When she did it was in a choked voice, "What then?"

"I think you can spare yourself such trouble!" said Asia kindly.

"Suppose I am forced into doing it. What should I do then ? "

"That's for you to decide Baidah. No one can impose their will on you, whoever they are!"

Baidah was silent, then said challengingly, "I shall take the risk. I hope that I will be successful."

Asia looked at her and said coldly, "You are free to do what you like. I hope you won't be sorry afterwards." Baidah got up saying, "I apologize for having taking up your time."

Asia, "Nothing to apologize for, I feel sorry for you! "

They shook hands and Baidah left the house. Asia felt she had just lost a friend.

A few weeks later, Baidah sat, waiting anxiously for her husband. It was nearly 11 p.m. and she was very worried. She looked at the clock every other minute, and at half past eleven she heard the door open and close softly. She got up and saw her husband enter. Her face became bright with happiness. She said, "Oh Foad, you are late!" She was scared when she saw he looked disappointed. He said, "Why haven't you gone to bed yet?"

"How can I sleep when you are still out? " asked Baidah.

While he was taking off his suit and putting on his pajama, he murmured, "That will cause you a lot of worry."

"How? " asked Baidah.

"Because I shall often be late. There is no need for you to stay awake and alone."

She was disturbed at his answer and could not believe her ears. So instead she said, "Your supper is ready." Smiling he said,

"I ate out. Some friends invited me to a club. They held a party in my honor."

"I hope you enjoyed it. But why didn't you tell me about it before?" asked Baidah.

"There was no need to tell you, as you won't go with me to such places," said Foad.

"Well, at least I wouldn't have got so worried."

Foad said, "You should have known that I was at a social engagement. I live amongst educated liberals, and cannot be isolated at home with a woman..." he uttered the last words in a sharp tone and then said, "Now, go and have your supper."

With tears in her eyes, she sadly said, "I am not hungry."

Foad said, "Then let's go to bed."

Baidah said, "I expect you've already done your prayer?"

Coldly, Foad said, "It is after mid-night. Prayer time is over."

"No", said Baidah, "It is not yet mid-night. Anyway it must be done even if it is late."

"You don't know how tired and sleepy I am!" said Foad.

"Fatigue doesn't exempt one from one's religious duty."

Mockingly he said, "Allah will accept my excuse."

"No matter-if you love me you must do your prayer." Angrily, Foad got up saying, "Please do not mix up my love with praying and fasting. Let me love you in my way not yours. Anyway, I will not allow you to call me to account about my prayer every night!"

He threw himself on the bed and fell asleep leaving Baidah shocked at his words. She recalled Asia's words which had apparently come true.

She hurried to the Holy Qur'an to seek comfort and refuge. She opened it at random and read the first verse of the page which said:

"... We did them no injustice, but they were unjust to themselves." (The Bees, 16: 118)

Days and weeks passed. Baidah could find no way of getting Foad to come to her way of thinking. Whenever she talked about religion, he either mocked her or turned a deaf ear. She tried her best to give him comfort and happiness at home, but she found him more and more interested in spending his time outside. One night she waited long time for him to come home, and when he did he seemed happy, so she thought it would be a good time for her to talk to him.

She said gently, "Don't you see that I am unhappy?"

Foad surprised said, "You are unhappy? Why? Haven't I provided you with all the means for your

comfort?"

"Yes, I must admit you have! Anyway, happiness is what matters; without it, there is no comfort."

"Why aren't you happy then ? " asked Foad.

Baidah said, "How can I be happy when you are so physically, spiritually and emotionally far away from me?"

"That's partly true," conceded Foad, "but I love you so I do not completely agree with what you say."

"If you loved me you would please me. You know I am not happy about your behavior."

"Have I hurt you in any way?" asked Foad, much surprised.

"You have not hurt me physically, but you have hurt me mentally by your disregard for the belief that you promised to respect. You are not careful enough about religion, to bring us closer to each other."

"Well, I am afraid I cannot change my life style. I cannot give up my friends or my social life. I cannot be cut off from others just to spend my life behind these walls. I cannot perform my prayer in a mosque just to please you. Faith stems from personal satisfaction. It would be nothing but hypocrisy if I worshipped Allah just for you. You know that I am an honest, straightforward person, both in my personal and business dealings. What more do you want? "

Baidah listened, while her heart sank. She said in broken voice, "What about me? Have I no place at all in your life?"

"You are my beloved wife. I love no one but you. Come closer to my heart and you will know real happiness."

"What do you mean?" said Baidah.

"I mean give up ideas that keep you from enjoying life's pleasures. Turn to me whole-heartedly, and I will make you taste a life that you are still unaware of. You are at cross-roads, either you put your hand in mine and I'll take you into a world of happiness, or you stay a prisoner in your house, content with it."

"Isn't there a third choice?" she asked. Foad was silent for a while and then said, "Yes, there is. We can separate; and though it would be hard for me, it would be less harmful than if you decided to refuse my suggestion."

Baidah was silent. She wanted to scream and run away, but she was helpless. She spent a long sleepless night, feeling as if she was between two fires both of which could burn her. She was about to choose a divorce, but then thought of the tiny creature moving in her womb.

This innocent creature tied her both to the house and her husband. She was soon to be a mother. She felt dizzy with thinking and, throwing her head on to her hand, she went into a dreamless sleep. When she woke up her husband said, "Baidah, why didn't you sleep in your bed?"

She opened her eyes to see him standing near her with a cheerful face as if he was ignorant of the reason why she hadn't gone to bed. She looked at him silently.

Anxiously, he said, "Why are you pale? Are you sick?" He put his hand round her and sat nearby.

She said, "Do you really not know why I am sad?"

He laughed gently saying, "Even if I know, what can I do about it? I have offered you my heart, so is it my fault if you reject it? By the way, today I have some visitors, so be ready for the occasion."

"Who are they?" said Baidah.

"Just some friends with their wives." He was silent waiting for his wife's reaction.

She said, "Will it be a mixed meeting for men and women?"

"Of course, you do not really expect me to stick to the old tradition of having a separate room for women, do you?"

"What about me then?" asked Baidah.

"You are free to do what you like," said Foad.

She was silent for a while; then, wishing to compromise and thus show some understanding, she said, "O.K, I shall be present."

Her husband was happy—he kissed her warmly saying, "Do you mean it? How happy I am. I shall be the happiest husband. I shall be so proud of your beauty. You are the sun that will outshine their dim lights."

"What has my beauty to do with anything? To please you, I have decided to be present but I will wear hijab."

Foad drew back in disgust, "In decent hijab? No! I do not want you to be mocked. Just prepare dinner and leave the house. That will be better. I can find some excuse to explain your absence."

Baidah could not tolerate such an insult. She got up saying, "It is better if I leave the house at once."

"What about the guests?" asked Foad.

"You can take them to a club".

"When will you come back?" asked Foad.

"I may never come back!" retorted Baidah.

"What about my child?" asked Foad, calmly and deliberately. Those words were strong enough to remind her of the bitter reality, the great dilemma she was in.

She despairingly murmured, "Oh, what a fool I was! How right Asia was!"

When he heard Asia's name, he said laughingly, "Oh, that snob! I proposed to her just to crush her pride and religious vanity. Now you remember her; what has she or her advice ever done for you? You are on the verge of destroying your marriage and your family life is about to fail because of this backward Asia!"

Baidah angrily said, "No, I won't allow you to speak ill of her. Had I listened to her advice I would have spared myself such an experience. Anyway, it is my own fault. I must bear the consequences."

Two years later, Asia sat thinking of her friend Baidah. She had heard a lot about her that she found difficult to believe. She could not believe that after a bitter struggle Baidah had given in to her husband. She had heard she no longer cared for Islamic hijab but accompanied her husband to parties and nightclubs. She had given birth to a boy, Farid and they said she was always sad and hardly ever smiled. Asia heard such rumors and wished she could see Baidah and learn the truth from her.

That morning the doorbell rang and Asia hurried to open it. She was surprised to see Baidah herself standing in front of her. She was pale and unhappy. Asia welcomed her and led her into the living room. Baidah sat silently, not knowing what to say.

Asia said "Oh, Baidah, how I hoped I'd see you; I've heard so much about you, but I was anxious to hear from you yourself."

Baidah cried bitterly saying, "I have no news except of disgrace and shame! I have been the victim of foolishness and self-deceit. Anyway I am not worthy of your friendship. I have fallen to the bottom of the abyss and am hopeless, may Allah forgive me!"

Asia felt great pity for her and kindly said, "You are still my sister and I must help you, to overcome this awful experience. Now, please tell me everything frankly as you did in the past."

Baidah said, "Well, you know that I never listened to your advice. I believed in a dream and ran to get it; I tried hard to get Foad to come round to my way of thinking but ailed. He never accepted my religious commitment, and treated me cruelly, humiliating me often. Sometimes, he was gentle and kind and sometimes he was frightening. I thought about divorce, but my son caused me to give up that idea, so I gave in, and obeyed him meekly. He exploited my weakness and increased his domination over me,

drawing me ever deeper into disgrace. I accepted everything just as a prisoner accepts his sentence. Now, you see me here!"

Asia could not blame her seeing her as she did and asked, "What's the problem now then?"

"He divorced me a week ago, because he blamed me for the death of our son", said Baidah. "Why?" asked Asia incredulously.

"Because I fasted in the month of Ramadan."

Asia asked, "Did your son die of hunger?"

Baidah replied, "Of course not. He was both breast-fed as well bottle-fed. He died after an illness." Asia was greatly moved and felt sorry for the bereaved mother who had suffered humiliation and disgrace. So you see, I have lost everything," continued Baidah.

Asia hugged her warmly and said, "You have not lost everything. You still have your religion calling you back through repentance, and I am still your loving friend.

You still have the broad road of the future ahead of you. Perhaps this experience will help you to make a new righteous start; a future that is built on firm foundations. Don't despair,

"...surely none despair of Allah's mercy except the unbelieving people." (Yousef, 12: 87)

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