

My Own Decision

"I wanted to make my own decision", she murmured as she looked down on her hands clasped on her lap.

"Even if it meant leaving *everything* behind? Everyone?" I retorted firmly. Anger was boiling up inside me.

There was a flash of guilt on maa's eyes as her head hung low. She parted her mouth to say something but then stopped abruptly. *Perhaps she didn't have the words to express how guilty she was.* I thought viciously. *She should have thought twice, no, multiple times before leaving us.* I felt nothing but pity for the woman.

"Why do you keep thinking Baba is all there's to it in our family? We're there as well. We *were* there as well. Did you even stop to think how much your actions would cost us?" I went on, deciding to show no mercy and speak my heart out for all the times we had to struggle because of our mother's absence.

My thoughts drifted back to Nuhash, my little brother. The image of him wailing on the floor refusing to acknowledge that his mother had left him flashed before my eyes.

I felt a sting in my eyes and realized I was beginning to tear up thinking about my brother. I subconsciously tried to convert my pain into anger and balled my fists, deciding to give her a piece of my mind.

"You know, after you left us, I started to realize exactly how selfish one would have to be to leave their home behind just to shield their ego." I seethed.

My words had a visible effect on maa. But not one that I had expected. She peered up at me, eyes full of disbelief and pain.

"After all that I had done for you, for all of you, for years, this is what I have to hear just for leaving?"

I rolled my eyes. *Not that same sacrificing excuse*, I thought, deciding not to back down. "*Just* leaving? You call it *just* leaving? I scoffed and added, "Do you really think our family was a child's game or something? that you just decided to abandon one day and never look back? As if it all meant *nothing*?" my voice rose near the end, anger was overflowing in my words.

She set her gaze firmly at me, completely unfazed by the pain and humiliation I was causing her.

"*You* tell me" she began in a calm and composed manner. "*What* was the meaning of me leaving? Or what was the meaning of me *not* leaving? What was worth any of it? What

difference did it make? Other than no cooked food on the table, your laundry unfolded, the house being an absolute mess, other than having someone at all your demands at all times- *tell me*" she emphasized, "*What* difference did it make?"

I opened my mouth to keep the argument going, only to realize I was left speechless. Neither had I ever seen my mother that way, nor had I ever been in a situation where she could convince me that she was right. I had seen her angry before, screaming her lungs out at us to wake up, eat, get ready quickly, to shower at the right time, and whatnot. *But this was different.* This was not just anger, this was the response to all the years of humiliation, pain and abuse my father had inflicted on her. That we had inflicted on her by never taking her side even if our lives depended on it. Her piercing gaze made it clear to me that she wasn't fighting here. She wasn't trying to justify her actions either. She was simply pointing, pointing out to me everything that I had turned a blind eye to for years. All the sufferings, the struggles, the pain she went through every single day because of baba, because of us, was now standing in between us, separating us and thinning out the bond of blood.

"After I left, did you think about me *once*, at least for one fleeting moment except for when you were hungry or looking for something you couldn't find?" Her voice was low yet I heard them, for the first time, I *heard* her, I could *hear* her. I could hear *maa*. Her words kept echoing inside my head, back and forth, until their meaning deeply rooted itself into my mind.

"Can you tell me who I am other than your mother?" she asked slowly, almost challengingly. I felt the tables turning as I hung my head low, unable to meet her eyes. "Did you ever see me cook something because *I* liked it? Or maybe go outside just because *I* wanted to? Do *anything at all* that didn't involve any of your interests? Or maybe just sit without a care in the world when your baba was around? No, right?" She articulated each word, her tone was even and low. She wasn't asking me any of it. She was *stating* everything. She was stating things so obvious and yet *so unnoticed, so unacknowledged*.

"For *once*, just for *once* I wanted to be in charge of what I do, what choice I make. I just wanted to take matters into my own hands and *decide for myself for once*, that's all I wanted," she whispered out after a minute of silence.

I couldn't move an inch. The air around me felt suffocating and claustrophobic. It felt like the walls of the tiny room my mother was living in were closing in on me. I could feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead as I kept fighting back my tears.

But suddenly the familiar warmth of an old and frail hand on my shoulder jolted me back to my surroundings. I peered up at her smiling face, painted with pain.

"Go home now child, it's getting late." she cooed as her warm hand was smoothing out my hair. I felt a tear roll down my cheek and pool up over my lips. I forced my legs and stood up like an obedient child. As I reached the doorframe, I glanced over my shoulder and smiled at maa, a genuine smile that emanated from the very bottom of my heart as she returned the same.