Fear

(Sain Sucha)

June, 23, 1973

The lake took the shape of a grey mirror and lured the flying insects to its breast. Under the water surface lurked hungry fish that waited to break through the grey sheath and engulf the flies.

It was a beautiful, tranquil evening in June. Michael and I often, at this hour in the dusk, when the fire burning in the horizon, would slowly turn into the orange-red, and then take the pink stole that gentle turned into a darkish sheath, came to this lake to fish. Ockelbo was about two hundred kilometers from Stockholm, and a bunch of us used to come here to spend holidays.

That evening too, Saibot and I were engaged in catching the fish, Mickael was busy roasting those freshly caught perch on the charcoal grill, after sprinkling salt and rosemary on them; while, Roberto prepared the vegetables. Roberto was Michael's wife's cousin, and had come from Argentina only last week. Some playful waves undulated on the lake's chest, and the song of the far away birds created a fantastic feeling. Suddenly, when the red float from Saibot's fishing rod disappeared he uttered, "Got it", and there started wild activity in the lake. All of us carefully looked at the struggle between the fish and Saibot, except Roberto who kept glancing behind us and watched our back. After a few minutes tussle, Saibot eventually succeeded in pulling out the perch. It was almost a kilogram catch. We all applauded for his success. Within half an hour we had landed five or six healthy looking brutes, and now it was up to Michael to show us his expertise. We opened a can of beer each, said "Skål!" and started quenching our thirst.

As the darkness enveloped us, I felt that Roberta was rather uneasy and kept on looking at the bushes behind us. When I could not contain myself, I asked Mickael about Roberto's discomfort. He, in turn, asked Roberto what was the matter with him.

– How could you all sit here?
– Why? I asker Roberto.
– What happens if someone shoot you from behind.

– Shoot me? Why would anyone would shoot me?
– Do soldiers need any reason to kill people?
– Roberto, this is Sweden, not Argentina that someone would shoot you.
– These ruthless soldiers, they can get to you anywhere!

December 31, 2011

It was chilling cold, the fresh fallen snow had stretched a white sheath on the ground, and the moonlight was at its peak. This time we celebrated the New Year at home, and our children had invited some of their friends. In Sweden New Year is celebrated spectacularly, with lots of fire-works. Our children, using their own assets and some of our generosity, had gathered an arsenal of bang-bangs. But before that tha-thoo we managed a lively party with dance and music. Arifa was from Bosnia, and had lived in Sweden with her family for the last fifteen years. She had met our daughter in the primary school and they were close friends. Arifa danced very well, and was quite popular among her friends. About quarter to twelve the music was stopped and people started putting on warm cloths to go out, it had become rather too cold. Amidst all the hustle bustle I found Arifa standing on one side. Hesitation overwhelmed her face and she looked rather pale. I asker her what was the matter.

– Nothing, actually nothing, she looked at me worriedly and then added, I do not want to go out.
– Why not, my question felt inappropriate but it slipped from my tongue.

Arifa tried to say something but failed, and looked at my daughter with troubled eyes.

Suddenly Sna came running, and said,

– Pappa, Arifa will not go out.

Without any detail, Sna's tone had communicated everything.

– Then we shall not go out either.

I asked to Farida to accompany other, and not to worry about us. When all had gone, Arifa, Sna and I went to the drawing room and sat there.

– I am so sorry, I spoiled your evening, said Arifa after a short while.

– What are you saying. I have known you since you were little, and if something is upsetting you then we are with you.

– Obviously, you are surprised at my behaviour, she said after a break.

Sna and I kept on looking at Arifa, smiling.

– I was only four years old when we left Bosnia. I do not remember much, but the explosions from the bombs, along with shouts and cries, fire flames and the sound of falling buildings are still in my mind. In those dark nights we all used to hide in the dark room long inside the house. Then one day came a big lorry that transferred us to the airport, and we reached a town in Sweden. My parents told us how difficult were those day, and how after hard work we were given stay permit, and then we came to Stockholm. Later on, we got this flat in Sollentuna, where we still live. So many years have passed; yet, each New Year's Eve is so heavy on us. Today, on Sna's invitation, for the first time, I have left our house; otherwise, my whole family spends this evening together, in a dark room. Every cracker and its blast remind us of our nights in Bosnia. My mother often starts shivering. When the midnight hour passes, we start switching on lights in our house, and it takes several hours before things become normal again.

– But now so many years have passed since that tragedy, does you mind still carry those memories?

– With each explosion time shrinks and takes us back to the nights in Bosnia.

– You are in Sweden now, here are no soldiers or killers chasing you!

– These ruthless soldiers, they can get to you anywhere!

June 21, 2022

Mid-summer, that falls in the third week of June, is the second major public holiday in Sweden. Normally, the Summer is at its peak at this time. In Stockholm, nights stroll around like some rejected lover. Gangs of youth from all over the country gather in the valleys of Dalarna to celebrate this festival. Along with wine and food, the frivolous boys and girls spend the night in the greenery of the valleys.

Those who cannot make up to Dalarna, celebrate Midsummer in their gardens where grilled meat and vegetables are most sought-after delicacies.

We too had arranged for a party this evening. Along with our near friends we had also invited Aziz Jatooi. Aziz and his wife Ishrat were from Sind in Pakistan and had come here three years ago to study at Halmstad University. As the University was closed because of holidays, they had come to Stockholm. When I learnt of their program, we decided to invite them. They were a liberal, cheerful pair. We spend the afternoon in the garden, but retreated to the main room as evening fell. First, we had a session of song and poetry, followed by the dinner. Farida had prepared several appetisers before the Biryani main course. On the dinner table, keeping his volume in mind, Aziz was placed by the window. All took their seats but Aziz stood there quite perplexed.

– Please, be seated, Aziz sahib!

– Can I sit here with this wall behind me?

– Of course, It was a bit tight there, that is why you were given the seat by the window.

– Yes, then after a few moments of hesitation he said, I have this problem that If I do not have a wall behind me, I do not feel comfortable.

– How come, you are in Sweden, not in Balochistan or Pakistan that the soldiers would come and abduct you!

– I am aware of that; but we have lost so many people that now I do not have the courage to sit in peace if I cannot see the free space in front of me.

– But what fear haunts you here?

– These ruthless soldiers, they can get to you anywhere!

(Sollentuna, May 13, 2023)