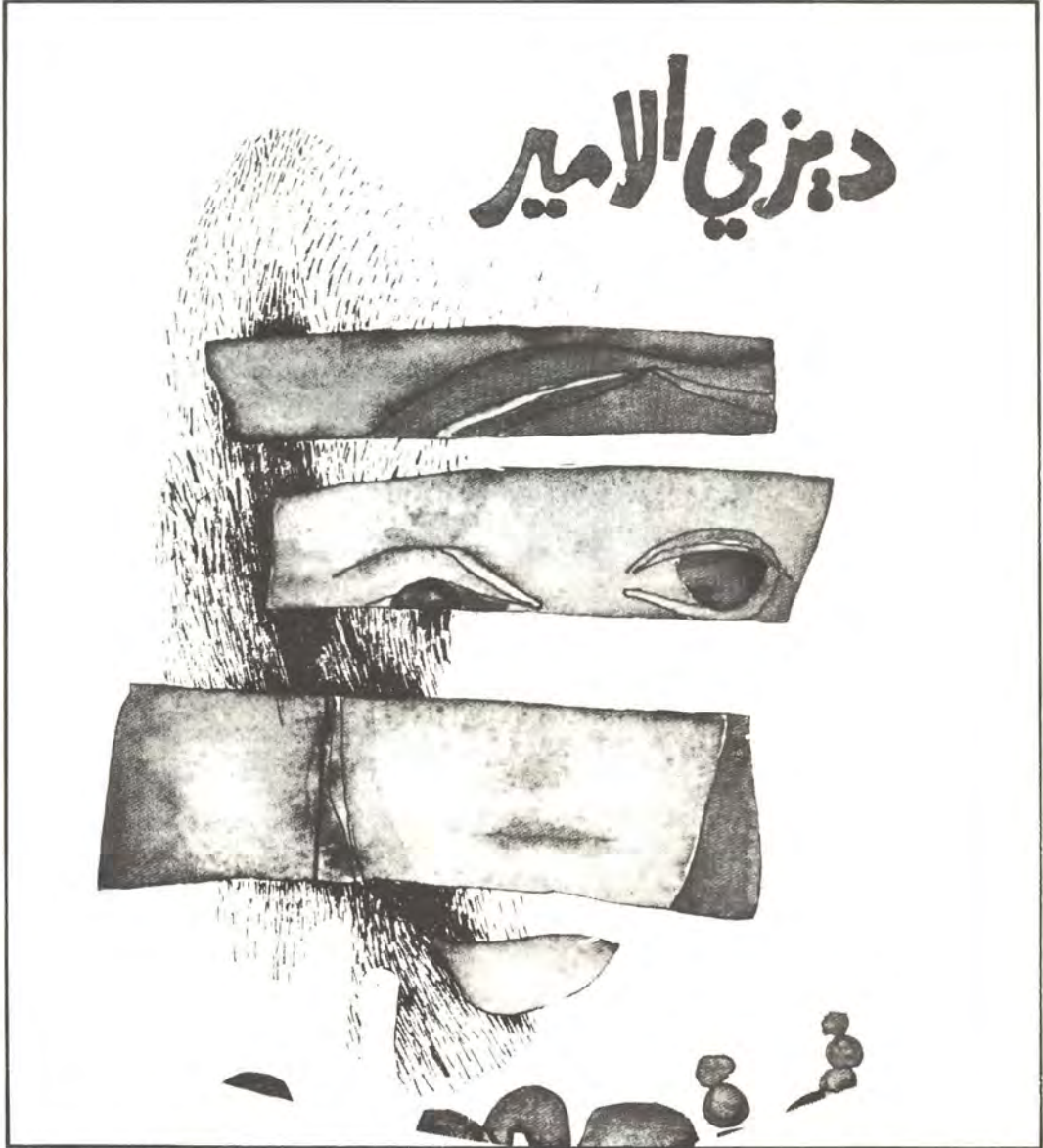


The False Hair-Piece (a short story)

by: Dasy Al Amir

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**The Faraway Country that She Loves
And the Wave Comes Back
The Cycle of Love and Hatred
Promises for Sale
On the Waiting List**

(*) Al Raida Nov., 1985, Vol. III, No.34.

She stopped as the traffic light changed. The car ahead bore a diplomatic plate... It was driven by a woman.

A woman? A woman?

What is her job? What is her position? Is she an Arab? She looks like a foreigner.

A child's head suddenly appeared sitting beside the woman.

Then the woman is married and is driving her husband's car. She does not merit a diplomatic plate... The car belongs to the man whose title she bears.

But **She** is an Arab woman holding diplomatic status. She earned it not through her father, her brother or her husband, but because she is capable, highly qualified and deserves it. She comes from an Arab country where women are appreciated and are granted positions on their own merit and not through dependence on a man's support.

The woman in front enjoys the diplomatic privileges that go with her husband's position. What is she proud of? What has she earned? She is like any other woman. She reaps the harvest of her husband's achievements.

But **She** has worked hard and fought for her position. In her memory flash the names of all those men she could have married. They would have given her a new name, a different life, a new home, other responsibilities. But all this would have been given to any woman who marries. Proudly she bears her own name, and has her unique responsibilities. She is not introduced as someone's daughter, wife or mother. Her name is distinguished, highly praised and well-known.

The car behind urges her to drive on as the traffic light changed and the diplomat's wife had already driven off quickly.

Of course, she had to hurry to reach her husband and children... She has responsibilities towards them.

She too has to hurry, not for someone, but because she has an appointment to record a story at the Radio Station... after which she has to attend the third part of a conference to critique the discussions that had taken place yesterday. The Indian woman delegate was very precise and talked in depth on her subject while the delegate from Ceylon could not reach such depth in the points he made. After all this is the woman's decade and women are surpassing men. The Indian woman delegate was however, married... **She** wondered how she manages to find the time to lecture at conferences, leaving her husband and home responsibilities. The Phillipino delegate, who is very beautiful and wears the latest fashion, had not given the impression of an intellectual. But once she started speaking the audience forgot her looks, beauty and elegance... They were only aware of her intelligence and eloquence.

She almost crossed the red light. The policeman smiled.

«I am sorry, I made a mistake,» she said.

He laughed, «There are special rules for women.»

She was mute with anger.

What are these special rules for women? Is it permitted for women to break the rules? Is this what they call women's rights? What about her other rights? that she cannot obtain because of her femininity? She has no need for such humiliating rights - even though - she excels over men.

As she drove by attractive shops displaying the latest models, her eyes caught a host of women going in and out. Don't these women have better things to do with their time and money except spend it on frivolities?

She reached the Radio Station. A man was still recording his program while two other men were seated waiting their turn. One of them stood up and offered her his chair. She thanked him and pointed out that she preferred to stand.

«I am a gentleman and cannot allow a lady to stand while I sit.»

«What is wrong with that? Is this not the age of equality between men and women.»

«I am offering you the chair for two reasons, one because you are a woman and two because you are a famous figure whom I admire and respect.»

She felt a glow within her. She thanked him again and went to the other side of the room to get a chair. A workman raced to help her. She wondered if his assistance was due to the fact that she was a woman or because he knew who she was...

The recording was completed and the Director of the Studio came towards her inviting her to enter. She looked at the two men and said, «These gentlemen were here first»... She almost said: In don't feel like a woman... I work more than men and do all my duties equally well if not better than men... But she kept silent.

She finished recording. The Producer congratulated her on her elocution saying she would not have to repeat any part... even men could not record so well. If he only knew what her job was. A job a thousand men wished for... What is so important about recording a story in comparison to the position she holds?

Getting back to the parking lot she found two other cars parked very close to hers. It would be difficult to maneuver it out. A man approached her saying «Can I help you? Getting your car out needs a man's strength.»

His words challenged her. She thanked him angrily and struggled to get it out without scratching or damaging the other two cars. She drove away with

victory in her eyes... But to her dismay she found herself in a narrow dead-end street... She drove forward and backward, worried about the time she had left. A little more maneuvering and she turned the car around. She relaxed and started driving back when suddenly she felt an impact that almost turned her car over. Two men surrounded her screaming and cursing - words she was not accustomed to hear.

Shocked by the accident, she heard one man shout «Get out of your car... see the damage you caused. Women should not be driving. Why don't they leave these things to those who know?»

To men?

The trunk of her car was bashed-in while the other car was damaged in the front right side. Being hit in the back was a clear indication that traffic rules were on her side... She had had the right of way. But before she could utter a word the street began to fill with people each giving his opinion while confusion reigned on all sides. More people came out of shops and cafes to watch the spectacle.

One of the men rudely addressed her «Pay us for the damage and we will leave you alone.» The words shook her out of the nightmare. The fault was theirs and they wanted her to pay for it?

«What are you saying? Are you accusing me? Who do you think I am...? How dare you...!» One of the spectators approached her and in a low voice said «You are a woman alone. Silence these men by giving them some money.»

«Who says I want them to be silent? Let them say what they want. I know the law is on my side... They are in the wrong.»

There was a lot of commotion as everybody around interfered. She could not see nor hear clearly what was going on as the crowd surged around her.

Suddenly she felt a hand tap her shoulder. She almost slapped it away - but a feminine voice said, «Come with me. Don't argue with these men. You can use my phone to call your husband, or father or brother to help you. A woman cannot deal with these men.» She led her to a beauty shop.

She took the receiver to dial... with whom was she going to speak? She had no husband, no brother or father. She looked at the owner of the shop eager to confess that she was alone... But she was ashamed. What could she say? I am the man in the house? I do the work of men? I compete with them at work and do better than them? What is the use of saying all this as the din of the men's voices outside rose even higher?

Then she remembered the insurance company. Surely they would come to her aid. How could she get out her phone book from her purse to find the number? She was supposed to know the number of her father, brother or husband.

She excused herself saying «I can't remember and must look for the number.» The first person she called was not in the office so she dialed the second person in charge and asked him to come to her aid quickly. He asked for the address. For help she looked towards the shop owner who took the receiver from her saying, «Sir, your sister is in my shop at... Its not your sister's fault, I mean your wife...» She hoped the insurance man would understand and pretend to be a relative. She did not know what he answered as the shop owner did not propose another relationship.

She stayed in the shop waiting for the man while images superimposed themselves in her mind... sitting behind her desk, writing reports, preparing for conferences on social issues, writing a story for a magazine, recording an interview...

In the beauty shop around her a number of ladies were sitting under the hair-dryer while others extended their hands to the manicurists. Facing her was a glass cabinet with a variety of false hair-pieces in different styles and colors. A curtain opened and a woman with a towel around her shoulders emerged with her face covered in white cream.

A man's voice calling her with authority startled her. A tall man with broad shoulders introduced himself as the expert from the insurance company. She hurried out with him and gave him her car papers, keys, and driver's licence. Among the papers was her diplomatic identification card. She looked at it and put it back in her purse.

She stopped the first taxi and asked the driver to take her to the shopping centre for women's clothes.

She asked the saleswoman to show her the latest trend in fashion.

The woman asked «Is it for you...?»

She answered «I want the latest most modern fashion.»

The shop also contained false hair-pieces.

She added «I want a false hair-piece too.»

The saleswoman inquired which one she wanted... «I want a false hair-piece... a woman's... not a man's.»