

The Pendulum

By Suha Naimy Haddad (*)

Shelling is at its peak outside. The candle light in the shelter flutters once to the left, another to the right, afraid of being strangled, trying to escape the invisible hand. I can see it playing shadows on the iced-staring faces around. It digs its way transparently through thick walls of darkness. How can such fragility penetrate such thickness? It tilts its body so graciously as it spells whispers and temptations. I can hear its murmurs: "Wake up Suha, feel life, feel warmth."

I was too nervous to answer and neglected its encouragement. I simply waved a gesture, "Go away," . . . and it curved its way far, far away from me. SILENCE . . .

I listened carefully to the sounds of sighs, of darkness. Everything was moving along with the slow rhythm of my heart.

- "It's your turn, Suha," uttered one of the neighbors.

It was my turn to shuffle the cards. As I shuffled, reshuffled and distributed the cards, I could feel its cold breath ticking tick, tick, tick, . . . My heart responded do-dj, do-dj, do-dj, do-dj. . . What an enchanting symphony these two compose!

Every now and then, amidst the shelling outside and the giggles of the fearers inside, I used to steal a look at the clock on the wall, to watch its pendulum move steadily left and right, in perfect symmetry and rhythm, with incredible precision. If only I . . .

- Hey Suha, it's your turn, where are you?
- Yes. I'm sorry. I was thinking of something else.

. . . And I would continue my game of cards with the aces and the hearts in the grab of my hand, assured that the clock is still ticking. Bombs are still falling heavily outside and it still . . . Shh, listen to it: tick, tick, tick, tick, . . . Children crying, playing; Parents praying, shouting, pleading . . . tick, tick, tick, tick, What harmony, what persistence.

"SUHAA" calling me. I woke up from my trance

- What is wrong with you?
- What are we playing cards? I asked.
- What do you mean? we are trying to kill time.
- Kill time? Can we do that?
SILENCE. . . We're too arrogant in claiming we can kill time.
- What do you want us to do? Sit and stare at the wall?
- But we can never kill time; Time kills us. We can never count minutes; Minutes count us.
- Who cares. They count us, we count them; Just play, will you?

I kept my silence. My heart was pumping faster. Cold sweat slipped on my body. Bombardment was extremely intense. I need reassurance; I need stability; I need the clock on the wall.

Its pendulum was still moving. How heavy is its movement and how swift. Funny, how unity is obtained through contrasts: day and night, black

and white, man and woman, positive and negative, or are these continuations? Do not name things, Suha. Things are what they are, broader than any definition.

I imagined the pendulum as Dr. Eckelberg's eyes (from Fitzgerald's book *The Great Gatsby*). I felt them watching me; they pierced my flesh and bones and saw what was beyond; They saw facts I never dared to face, or even bothered and wanted to know they existed. His eyes scared me. I looked away; I avoided eye-contact, but I could still feel his eyes watching me from far, still steady, heavy and swift. I whispered to myself: get busy Suha. do not look in time's eyes. You'll be blinded; You'll be swept away. At that time, I felt a cold breath breathing down my neck, and a strange sort of music coming from Dr. Eckelberg's eyes. I looked at them. My eyes stared, my body shook, my heart, my heart; Where is my heart? I can't catch my breath. What happened? Why did the pendulum stop? I need to feel its stability, its persistence; It gives me courage. My heart is beating alone now; Where is the ticking? What happened to my symphony? Will I survive? I am petrified. somebody, somewhere help me. I am suffocating. Now the pendulum stands still; No ticking, no moving, no tranquility, no coldness, no warmth, no nothing. I looked at the people around. I saw lips moving, gestures waving, but I could not hear any words, nor understand any signs. I felt myself alone, yet surrounded by tens. I focussed on those around, but they were distant, a blurred vision.



Where am I? I asked myself.

(No answer)

- Did I step out of time? Why isn't the pendulum moving? Am I dead or alive? What is death? Could the pendulum be moving, but I am unable to see it, in the way that I cannot hear the moving, seemingly soundless lips.
- Stop asking. Look within.
- Who is this?
- I am Dr. Ickelberg.
- But you're supposed to be on the wall.
- I'm everywhere and nowhere. You are my wall. I exist with you, I don't exist with you.
- I'm afraid I don't understand. How can you be in me? There is no one in me but me; And how can you exist and not exist. You're not making any sense.
- There are two yous in you. A major and a minor. An eternal timeless free one, and another timed to starve if not fed.
- Excuse me?
- Who are you?
- What do you mean? My name is Suha and . . .
- Is this who you are? SILENCE . . .
- Why are you here?

- Because there are bombs outside.
- No, I mean here in this so-called existence.
- Well, I'm here to . . . to fulfill myself.
- And then?
- Then, I die.
- If you die in the end, why are you born in the first place?
- W . . . Well; That's the law of nature.
- People are batteries. You are a battery.

I felt absolutely humiliated.

- Dr. Ickelberg; Certainly I'm not a battery! I'm a human being.
- You are my battery; A vital element for my motion, for my existence. Whenever the battery is out of function, I wisely and selfishly refill you to refunction; You make me, and I make you, but not you.
- Did I trespass life to be talking to you?
- No. I'm in there, in your center. You can abolish me whenever you like.

The echo grew further.

I looked around, indeed, people are

machines that are functioning. I felt myself a shadow in the world of non-existence, seen yet not seen, alive yet not alive, as if belonging to another world. Am I dead? I can hear bombs falling in a distance and I can feel panic and fear; or are these echoes of my past life? Beside me my mother sits with the radio in her lap, holding it with strange attachment and passion as if a newborn. I look at the faces around. Panic is the headline, people are moving like muppets, but what story or what director? How can we move without knowing why, what?

I still feel myself alone. I am still watched, still lost in my existence, still wondering where I am. Am I dead, or am I alive? Why did the clock on the wall stop? I am lost. I am scared. Where am I? •

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