

She was only a Girl

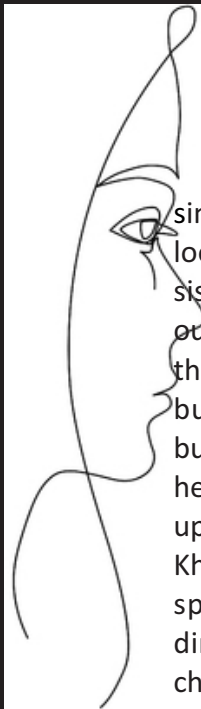
Maria was the only daughter among four boys. Being the only girl, and also being only a girl, she was to fulfil the family obligation of marrying the man chosen by her father at the age of 18. For her, marriage was a trap set to allure her into a life full of self-denial. On the other hand, for her family her marriage was a forward stride into wealth and honour. Two days after her eighteenth birthday, she was made or rather forced to marry Khan, who was a rich businessman.

Everything was new to Maria at her in laws'; she learnt to do some cooking for her husband as well as cleaning and seeing to other household chores. However, she had one preoccupation in her life which she never wanted to part with. Painting was her only passion. All her dreams were woven around the pursuit of

her dream to become an artist, the kind that would create news and the kind that would hold ground-breaking exhibitions. But her marriage reminded her of the fact that she was only a girl. All aspirations were possible only in her imagination. She was born to carry forth the family traditions; to bear children and attend to her husband and in-laws. He often denied her requests to enjoy a picnic on a beautiful landscape as he was too busy with his inflexibly tight schedules. For ages she could not capture a striking scenery with her pencil. The mother-in-law was not a very good fan of her paintings. According to her, "Women have better things to do in life."

Life was boring with just a speck of time to spare on her passion. She had quite a few paintings of beautiful landscapes where she yearned to be in. But they were kept hidden just the way she was being hidden in the Khan mansion.

It was not a new thing for her to keep her fancies to herself after marriage



since she spent most of her time looking at her mother -in-law and sister – in law wearing expensive outfits and going out for parties, and the rest of her time staring at her busy husband taking calls to his business partners whom she often heard him yelling at. Maria was fed up with looking at the weary face Khan wore during the little time they spent together: at lunch and at dinner. She hardly had any other choice.

Maria kept looking at the marble walls that shone with the light that fell from the chandelier. She remembered the hours filled with laughter during the fun filled conversations she had with her cousins back at home. Khan provided her with everything: expensive clothes, delicious meals, a variety of expensive and exclusive collections of jewelry, but she could rarely show herself decked up as she was merely a caged ornament at Khan's mansion. Khan spent most of his time abroad. He was a dedicated, career oriented man who only intended to expand his business empire.

Back at home her family was overwhelmingly rejoicing the fact that they tied knots with one of the

most outstanding business families in the country.

“Maria, you are very lucky” her mum reassured her one evening.

“Do you think so? I would have felt lucky if I were one of those fish swimming in that beautiful, fish tank, but I'm not one”

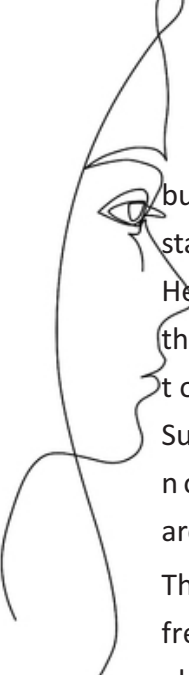
“Stop talking nonsense, you silly girl.”

“ I'm sorry, Mother.” Those were the last words she heard from her daughter before hanging up. Her motherly instinct told her something was not right.

“Girls nowadays are too naïve to understand the value of being the daughter –in-law of a wealthy house hold” she told her husband to which he answered in the affirmative.

She was determined to advise Maria on leading a good married life next time she met her.

Next day, Khan was returning home after a two-week long tightly scheduled business trip. On his way, after much thought Khan called one of his friends who owned a holiday



bungalow and arranged for a long stay in the mountains.

He entered his mansion thinking of telling this to his beloved. Surprisingly, there was not a single soul around.

The whole house was freakishly empty. The gloom that lingered was most unusual.

**“ I ' m s o r r y ,
M o t h e r . ” T h o s e
w e r e t h e l a s t w o r d s
s h e h e a r d f r o m h e r
d a u g h t e r b e f o r e
h a n g i n g u p . H e r
m o t h e r l y i n s t i n c t
t o l d h e r s o m e t h i n g
w a s n o t r i g h t .**

He sat for tea as usual taking the

newspaper, expecting Maria to serve his breakfast. He read the headlines, "A hanging body found at Khan's Mansion"

