Love and Loss

Description

The AutoEthnographer

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Authorâ??s Memo

One of the challenges of writing from oneâ??s experience is not knowing when itâ??s the character who is speaking or the writer. â??Love and Loss,â?• is from the experience of losing someone who you thought would be a part of your family, only to realize that their journey was a different one and they were never meant to be part of your life. It was also written from a feminist perspective of where we as women tend to place the pressure of having children to fulfill ourselves. It might be fulfilling for some but not for others. This story also tries to show how we as women cannot let others define who we are. We have to pursue what makes us happy or what makes us feel that we are whole. That does not make us selfish, but rather creates a better version of ourselves.

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Chapter 1

Helen looked at the curly head gazing down and wondered when had the young girl learnt to be so cruel? Where was the child who was supposed to love her and want to spend time with her? Where had it all gone wrong? She thought back to the day of the phone call.

â??Helen, this is your aunt, you know our relative Aisha? Her daughter passed away leaving behind a little girl. The husband left a long time ago and so the daughter is now an orphan. Aisha is an invalid herself and cannot look after the little girl, she is about 13 years old, her name is Nimi. I was wondering, you know how you and Sajjad were thinking of adopting a child? Why not Nimi?â?•

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â??But Auntie will Nimi even want to come and live with us? We live in another part of the world; we would have to worry about immigration and so many other legalities. What if she wants to stay with her grandmother?â?•

â??Well, you can always visit with her and see what she thinks.â?•Helen hung up and felt the beating of her heart, her hands were shaking.

Helen hung up and felt the beating of her heart, her hands were shaking. She tried to pick up the phone to call Sajjad but she felt she was too excited to even dial the number. She took great gulps of air and decided to go lie down. The doctor had told her that stress was not good for her. Helen climbed the steps and lay down, trying to breathe through her excitement. Could it be possible? Had God finally answered her prayer, would she and Sajjad have a child of their own? After nearly fifteen years of marriage and given her health, she had given up any hopes of having children. But perhaps adoption was the answer?

Sajjad was always against adopting and worried about how the child might feel when he or she grew up. But Nimi was already thirteen and a relative. Would he agree? Helen was too nervous to get her hopes up. A little girl to raise, a friend, a companion. Helen wondered if her dreams would finally come true. She knew she had no experience being a mother, but perhaps with time she could learn?

Chapter 2

Helen came back to the present and gazed outside trying to see if she could spot the birds, nature always soothed her and today she needed to calm herself. She could hear Nimi moving around. But Helen was too tired to call her, but then again, she decided she needed to speak to her and tell her how she felt.

â??Nimi, Nimi. Come here.â?•

She heard a door shut and then a young girl emerged. She had curly hair and dark eyes. She was tall in stature and thin. She gazed with the same defiance and tightening of her lips that Helen had become accustomed to.

â??Nimi why are you behaving this way? I am only telling you not to dress in this way for your on good. Your body should not be on display, you are far too young to display your chest for the whole world to see.â?•

Nimi glared at Helen and did not say anything.

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â??Nimi say something, do you not want to share your thoughts or feelings? I am here to talk to you but I canâ??t if I am met with silence.â?•

Nimi just kept silent. Her whole body was taut and it seemed that any moment she would storm out. Helen could feel the tension, her heart started to accelerate and she decided to look away instead.

â??Can I go now, are you done?â?•

â??Yes, you can leave.â?•

â??Helen sat in silence as her mind felt jumbled with thoughts, guilt, anger and pain and a sense of loss which were bumping around her seeking room within her heart and mind.

Helen sat in silence as her mind felt jumbled with thoughts, guilt, anger and pain and a sense of loss which were bumping around her seeking room within her heart and mind. Helen could feel the beginnings of panic and breathlessness and lay down to rest, to make it pass. She heard a door slam shut but felt the beginnings of her fatigue.

â??Did you get the pads? I need them I have my periods?â?•

Helen whispered, â??No I was not able to.â?•

â??Why? You are a lazy ass bitch. I am going to tell everyone that you are abusive and letâ??s see how long people think you are good person.â?•

Helen could not speak, her mind was beginning to feel numb, her heart felt that it would burst, tears blurred her vision and then she knew no more.

Chapter 3

Helen was so excited the plane had finally landed and although the trip from Canada to Asia was a rigorous one, Helen could not believe they were finally here. She beamed at Sajjad with delight. Sajjad looked back at her with his serious black eyes and Helen noticed with a wrenching of her heart that there were now more greys in his hair, that instead of laugh lines there were more lines of worry. Helen reached out and touched his cheek softly. No words were needed after all this time he knew how she was feeling and she also knew he was worried about how they would be greeted.

The car ride felt long and tedious, but Helen refused to give in to her exhaustion. She willed herself to fight back the fatigue that controlled her and dominated her. She turned a deaf ear to noise and just gazed out at all the colors and chaos that was Asia. Cars and rickshaws, people and vendors all fighting their way through this maze that was the city. After what felt like forever Helen and Sajjad arrived at her Aunts House. Nimi was there.

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â??She felt a wrenching in her heart and before she could help herself went to Nimi to hug her.

Helen felt breathless when she saw the young girl standing by herself forlornly. Her long curly dark hair and chubby cheeks and her dark penetrating eyes, all seemed to speak to Helen. She felt a wrenching in her heart and before she could help herself went to Nimi to hug her. Helen hoped to put warmth into her hug, to make Nimi realize that she was there for her. But Nimi stood stiffly in her embrace and after a few minutes Helen moved away in embarrassment.

For the next few days Helen tried to be cautious as she tried to engage Nimi and spend time with her. Nimi was willing to sit with her but only replied with a â??Yesâ?• or â??No.â?• Helen felt frustrated but Sajjad kept on reminding her to be patient.

Helen was worried about going through the legal process of filing for Nimiâ??s paper if she was not sure that she wanted to be with Helen and Sajjad. The few times that Helen spoke to Nimi and asked, â??Would you like to come and stay with us?â?• Nimi would look at Helen and say â??Yes.â?• She would say it with such conviction that Helen started to believe that perhaps deep down Nimi did want to be with them. Till one day Nimi asked her â??Do you even know how to be a mother?â?•

Helen could not think and just said, â??Does anyone truly know how to be a mother?â?• Nimi had left and Helen went and told Sajjad about her Nimiâ??s question. Helen had gotten up and left and wondered later why she had not seen the signs. Had her desperation forced her to not pay attention to what was so blatantly obvious.

â??Helen knew that something had to change. As she slowly woke up, she felt loss, the loss of having tried again and again and failing with Nimi. She realized that her health and her heart were slowly failing.

Looking back now Helen wanted to laugh hysterically when she thought back to that question. No, she did not know how to be a mother. She asked herself everyday why she was unable to be a mother, to feel the joy of carrying her child, to go through the swelling, the discomfort and finally to be able to see the likeness of herself or Sajjad. It made her feel less, like somehow because she could not have children, she was an abnormality. Sajjad did not understand her feelings, his reply was that having a child did not define her, nor did it make anyone special. He would point out all the parents who were terrible at parenting and yet nothing he said made her feel whole.

Helen knew that something had to change. As she slowly woke up, she felt loss, the loss of having tried again and again and failing with Nimi. She realized that her health and her heart were slowly failing. Sajjad saw it too, but had no idea how to help her. Nimi was polite with him and in many ways, she seemed to respect him more than she did Helen. When Sajjad was around she did not throw her tantrums or yell or call Helen names. Helen did not mention any of these things to Sajjad and decided to keep it all to herself.

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Chapter 4

Helen decided to go for a walk as she was tired of feeling tired, of always being sad. What kind of a wife was she if she always felt distracted and depressed. She knew Sajjad did not believe her when she tried to smile and act as though nothing was wrong. Yet she could never tell him the truth that she had failed with Nimi, that Nimi hated her. That the Nimi he saw was so different than who she had to deal with everyday. There was a part of her that wished she had never brought Nimi with her, that she had remained back with her grandmother. Helen started walking briskly and turned to go when her neighbour from next door waved at her.

Mrs. Halima was an elderly woman who lived with her invalid husband. She was a heavy-set woman with twinkling brown eyes and dark hair. She always wore shalwar kameez and today was no exception. Helen waved and started walking towards her. â??Helen how have you been? I donâ??t see you these days you have forgotten about us?

â??No no, its not that I have not been feeling well and just trying to rest up as much as possible.

â??Oh, is everything okay?â?• Mrs. Halima looked at her shrewdly and asked.

â??Everything is fine. Just been tired and Nimi is now in highschool so trying to sort out courses etc. you know how it is.â?•

What kind of a wife was she if she always felt distracted and depressed.

â??I see her sometimes when I am sitting outside, she looks away when I wave at her. I hope this doesnâ??t sound awful but I hear her sometimes yelling at you and I wondered if everything is okay.â?•

Helen tried to push back the tears, but they slipped out. â??She hates me. Anything I say is a trigger for her. Everything I say to her is taken as a criticism.â?•

Mrs. Halima looked at her seriously and said, â??I feel sorry for the girl at the loss of her parents and she is taking out her anger on you. But that is not fair on you. How long will you accept this behaviour? At some point you have to take charge and put your foot down.â?•

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â??But if I do that, I will isolate her even more. Its all my fault for bringing her so far from everyone and everything she knows.

â??But itâ??s been a few years now Helen and I feel itâ??s become worse for you. Better for her. She gets to do whatever and she makes you feel guilty that if you say anything to her, you are creating an emotional trauma for her.â?•

â??Yes, thatâ??s exactly how she makes me feel. In fact, she has threated to take her life the few times I have tried to be firm with her. How did you know?â?•

A sad look passed Mrs. Halimaâ??s face. â??I know as my sister faced a very similar situation with her biological daughter. In the end my sister would pray for death as she felt she did not have the strength to stand up against her daughterâ??s abuse.â?•

Helen was surprised to hear about Mrs. Halimaâ??s sister.

â??Having a child does not make you who you are, be true to who you are. You are not less or unworthy. You are precious to those whose lives you touch, think of Sajjad and you will know what I mean.â?•

â??Listen Helen I donâ??t want what happened to my sister to happen to you. I know you are a good person. I know you have tried, but at some point, you have to think about yourself. You have to let go and stand your groundâ?•

â??But what if she hurts herself?â?•

â??Helen listen to me, the choices people make are their own, you cannot blame yourself or take on the role of protecting everyone.â?•

â??Its all my fault Mrs. Halima. It was my idea to bring her, in my desperation to have a child. Why why couldnâ??t I have a child of my own?â?•

As Helen felt overcome with the power to scream Mrs. Halima hugged Helen tightly. â??You donâ??t have your Parents so I will tell you what they would have told you. Having a child does not make you who you are, be true to who you are. You are not less or unworthy. You are precious to those whose lives you touch, think of Sajjad and you will know what I mean.â?• Helen continued to cry, silently as she was cocooned in Mrs. Sajjadâ??s embrace. She was reminded of her mother and how she would always feel that her motherâ??s warmth ate away her sorrow.

Helen continued to cry, silently as she was cocooned in Mrs. Sajjadâ??s embrace. She was reminded of her mother and how she would always feel that her motherâ??s warmth ate away her sorrow.

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Helen reflected on what Mrs. Halima had said and knew she had a lot of soul searching to do. It wasnâ??t easy facing the voices that tormented her so, that told her she was useless, her health, her inability to have children everything was her fault. She no longer wanted to listen to those voices. She wanted to live, to feel that she had some control of her life. In the days that proceeded Helen found herself staying more and more away from Nimi to the point that she would no longer say anything that she wanted: to advise her or say anything to her.

However, one day when Helen returned from the grocery, she heard a strange gagging sound. She rushed upstairs and found Nimi gagging, Helen panicked and tried to pull out whatever was inside her mouth. Strangely Nimi cooperated and some white coloured pills came out. â??What are these? What did you do?â?•

Nimi pointed to her desk where she had written a note not to Helen but to Sajjad saying that she was ending her life as the boy she loved did not love her back. Helen suspected she liked someone but Nimi had chosen never to talk about the boy. Helen looked at the bottle next to Nimiâ??s bedside and saw that the pills were melatonin and heaved a sigh of relief. She quickly went out of the room and called the doctor who was unable to give her any advise. The doctor wanted Helen to be sympathetic and careful. Helen wondered how much more careful and sympathetic did she have to be. How was any of this her fault?

She went back to Nimiâ??s room. â??Do you want to talk about it?â?•

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â??No. I know you wonâ??t approve of me dating, so I never told you about him.

Helen sighed, â??Listen Nimi I know I might be old-fashioned. But if you care for him then thatâ??s what matters. I donâ??t feel you are old enough to have a serious relationship. But thatâ??s my opinion.â?•

Nimi looked away and Helen decided to leave the room. When Sajjad came home they discussed about what they should do. Sajjad tried to speak to Nimi and she was more forthcoming with him and mentioned that she was heartbroken at what had happened between herself and her boyfriend. The next few days was torturous for Helen who was scared to say anything or do anything to trigger Nimi. She felt almost like a prisoner in her own home. The only respite she got was when Nimi went to school. When she was back home, she would either stay in her room or walk around with a gloomy face and cry. If Helen tried to approach her, she would sometimes allow it and sometimes walk back to her room.

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A few weeks had passed and things were beginning to be normal. Nimi approached Helen and told her that she would be spending the night at a friendâ??s. Helen was not comfortable with the idea saying, â??Who is the friend? Where does she live? Do we know her?â?•

â??God why are you like this. She is my friend and thatâ??s all that matters.â?•

Helen took a deep breath, â??I am only asking to make sure you are safe and if there is an emergency we know where to reach you.â?•

â??You donâ??t trust me. You always have these stupid rules.â?•

Helen could feel her heart accelerate, words tumbled out and rage like she had never felt seemed to consume her.

â??You are wrong Nimi. I know nothing about your friends or what you do as you donâ??t like to share your life with me. I have always tried to be understanding, but you cannot ask me to change my cultural and religious beliefs either.â?•

â??I donâ??t believe in all thatâ?•

Helen prayed for patience, â??And I have never imposed my beliefs on you either. But when it comes to your safety or your life, I do want to help you or be there for you.â?•

â??You are only my mother when it suits me, when I have to tell others you guys are my Parents. I donâ??t have to share my life with you. If you push me too much, I will tell everyone that you guys are the reason for my trauma.â?•

Helen could feel her heart accelerate, words tumbled out and rage like she had never felt seemed to consume her. â??I will only say this once, you donâ??t have to be my child. But everything we did came from a place of love. If you are going to be cruel and selfish then thatâ??s your choice. I will no longer take any form of abuse from you. Because what you are doing to me is abuse. You can say whatever you like I know the truth and thatâ??s all that matters. You are going to university soon and we will pay for everything but from now on this relationship will be how much you want to give into it. I will no longer go out of my way for you.â?•

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â??Helen you feel too deeply and too intensely and this is why you get hurt. You have to let go otherwise your body and soul will never heal.â?•

â??Whatever.â?• Nimi stormed out and did not look back.

Helen decided then and there that she was done. She went to her room and sat down waiting for her breath to come back to normal. She went to a closet and rummaged through a box. Inside were magazines where she had written and published in Asia many many years ago. Helen read through them and thought back to all the dreams she had and all that she had let go for her health, her family. She did not realize that tears were falling down her face and tried to steady her breathing again. She decided to open up the laptop that Sajjad had bought for her and had hoped she would start writing again. She touched it with reverence, feeling as though she was saying hello to an old friend.

Something her mother had told her came to her, â??Helen you feel too deeply and too intensely and this is why you get hurt. You have to let go otherwise your body and soul will never heal.â?• Helen sat down and tried to put words down on the empty word document. As she poured her sorrow, her anger, she tried to let go of her tormenting herself for not being able to be a mother, for her health, for her losses and for her failure with Nimi. She tried to let go of her guilt and her hatred towards herself which seemed to always want to engulf her in sorrow and as she typed and wrote she promised herself to be kinder to herself and love herself a little more.

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