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Human Fear

by Vera Gajic

The basis of all human fears I thought. A closed door, slightly ajar.

The fear of the unknown but with a possibility of knowing, slightly ajar, it coming out or you going in. Isn't that what all horror films are about? The protagonists can't resist the slightly open door despite everyone knowing you run away from danger not towards it. That's presumably why we can't resist watching, shouting at the screen warning the girl or the boy; don't go down into that cellar or up into that loft, there be monsters, but they always do. It wouldn't be much of a film if they just walked away I suppose.

Is that why we go through with scary things because there wouldn't be much of a life if we didn't? But that's not me. I wouldn't go down into that cellar I am far too sensible, or am I? Maybe I don't want to be sensible. Is that why I am contemplating this offer of marriage? The thought of giving up my hard won freedom terrifies me.

I know so few independent women. How many of the nuns at my school really wanted to be nuns? Maybe they became nuns because they were scared of marriage like I am, of having a man control their life and babies control their body.

I have seen through the partially open door at what look like happy marriages but no one tells you what is really going on. Before my father died when I was ten I heard things I shouldn't have. I know it wasn't easy being married to him but my mother would never admit it even after he'd died she wouldn't say a bad word against him. What was she scared of? Did she think he'd come back to haunt her if she defiled his memory. I knew he wasn't the perfect husband but how imperfect I might never know.

I have tried to ask Mother now that I have this decision to make but she is no help.

“You must get married Maureen, what else will you do with your life? You must have children.”

But why must I have children? I want to shout at her. Just because it is the thing to do is not reason enough. I have a career, I can support myself. I can do what I want. I will give him my answer, I can't do it.

“But why?” he asks when I tell him “don't you want to share this adventure of life and experience all it has to offer or is it just me?”

“No it is not you, if I were to marry anyone I can't think of anyone I would rather marry but it is just the marriage itself. The institution has responsibilities and expectations. It gives power to the roles within it and however much you declare you will not try to control me how can I be sure you won't change? That you won't become like every other married man I know and expect nay, insist on a wife to be a wife.”

“What do you mean by being a wife?” Gerald asked

“Someone who obeys her husband and the calling of her sex, her role. To lose oneself and to be replaced by a wife and worse a mother.”

“But what is wrong with being a wife? and you like children, you've said that before.”

“Yes at a distance, I don't know if I would love or even like my own,” I say. I

don't think this is getting through to him. How can you know if you are going to love your child. What if you hate them, you can't give them back. The risk is enormous. I would then be trapped until that child grew up and I would be old.

“You have to trust it will be OK,” he said.

“But who do I have to trust? There is no one to trust. You don't have control over what our child would be like any more than I do. Doesn't that frighten you?”

Why wasn't he as scared as me? It's worse than a mad man in the cellar, you could run away but you couldn't run away from your child.

“We could have an Oedipus, have you ever thought of that?” I asked

“But why would we have an Oedipus? there is nothing to indicate we would have an abnormal child,” said Gerald

“Do you think Oedipus's mother thought she would have an Oedipus? She wouldn't have had him if she'd suspected would she?” Is that what was really scaring me? I didn't know anymore but I do know that this is probably my last chance. I am past my best childbearing years. I thought I wouldn't have to make this choice but here is Gerald asking me to make this terrifying leap into the unknown.

I don't know what scares me most, that I might wake up and lament the child I didn't have or wake up one day and see the monster I birthed kill my husband. I know which one is worse but the fact that it is less likely doesn't make it less terrifying.