

A Silent Sacrifice

by Naomi D'Souza

"She hasn't been communicating much today. You know, the way she usually does."

Finally, I'm outside. Weeping willows. Jabs of hot, painful lightning.

"I don't know! There's nothing we can do. She thinks it's her own battle to fight."

Raindrops trickling down like pennies. Bitterly cleaving thunder.

"I just wish – I just wish . . . I could be a better mother . . . for her."

And a rhythm in the midst of it all – a symphony, cascading like tears.

"But I'm not."

Those words, said on the phone, had been suffocated in static – but I'd still heard them. Sticky tears had streamed down my cheeks; I couldn't call out to my mother from the kitchen, couldn't tell her what I wanted her to hear the most.

Now, spears of wind hurl themselves around as I walk down the street, holding the orange portfolio that my father forgot to take to work. I'm thinking, *what kind of a daughter am I? I can't even tell my own mother that I love her.*

A bunch of papers are plastered all over the next street. LOST DOG, they say, HAVE YOU SEEN HIM?

My head throbs. Questions! They're everywhere. I think of all the questions I'm asked every day. "Yes" or "no" ones are fine. But "*How are you feeling?*" is a question that always gets me. Sometimes, I ache for it. Other times, it's the last straw. Emotions surface like crazy, and I have no choice but to keep them bottled up. To seal the cap even tighter.

Which is why I envy other people. They can do all sorts of things with words, as if bending a kind of magic to their will. They can yell out a word in fierce anger, choke on it with laughter, state it icily and cut right to the core, sarcastically mutter it under their breath . . .

I can't speak, in case you're wondering by now. I was born mute. I know sign language, but it's turned out to be pointless because no one else does, except my parents. I figured it's just easier to write down replies on a notepad.

Everyone has got something I don't have, something special.

A voice in this world.

Meanwhile, I'm in this world chained to the bottom of the ocean. I can't do anything about it.

Now, as I shove through swarms of people and they jostle me, I feel annoyed. They're all prattling like a flock of seagulls. *Chatterboxes.* I follow them to a streetlight, and we've got to wait before crossing. I'm just itching to be out of here. Crowds don't mean anything to me anymore.

Maybe you're wondering what I mean by that. Well, let me clarify something first. It may seem totally off topic, but I promise it's not.

There's a difference between being alone and being lonely. Being alone is a physical state where nobody is near or around you. For instance, you could be all alone in your bedroom. Maybe you want some company, maybe you don't. Either way, you could go right back outside and not be alone anymore. It's a choice.

Being lonely is different, though. That's where you could be in a room full of laughing, talking people, and still feel completely, utterly alone. Like an outcast. The one who doesn't belong, who never will.

The fly on the wall.

That's loneliness. You *want* to fit in, to be accepted, to be understood, but you aren't – and that hurts.

I jerk out of my thoughts. There's a small girl up ahead, about five years old. Blond pigtailed bobbing, eyes sparkling. Right in the middle of the road – on a green light!

I don't think the truck driver sees her. He's roaring nearer, high up; she's bending down to pick up a doll she's dropped, crouched she's too small to be seen! Almost instantly, she stands up again and realizes her mistake. Terror crosses her face.

It's going to happen quickly. In my mind, I see a horror movie playing out. I hear her silent screams, calling out for her mother. I don't need her voice to know what she's going through. The unspoken words are as clear as daylight.

I think of the headlines that'll cover the newspaper tomorrow. LITTLE GIRL, they'll say, blaring red. RUN OVER BY TRUCK ON HARTLAND STREET.

Full of life. Gone.

Most of the people haven't noticed. One lady across from me turns pale and lets out a strangled gasp. A man across the street gives a start.

But nobody moves. Then I realize what they're all thinking: it's too late. The horror movie is beginning and nobody is ready for it, nobody wants to see it. It's their life or hers.

My thoughts suddenly change direction. Drastically.

It's *my* life or hers.

They've all lost their voices. They don't know what it's like. But I do. I lost my voice a long time ago.

Without hesitation, I run, shoving my whole body against the little girl, throwing her out of the way. I wonder what her name is. Catharine, Shayla, Lili . . . She lands on the pavement. Hard. And I hear a crunch and feel the wheels. Seething pain.

I hear screams. But I know they're not mine, because I never could scream. It's everyone else. The bystanders. The ones with the voices, the ones with an influence over the world.

My thoughts start to move like the gears of a clock that is working too slowly. Rewinding themselves. Then, jerking forward. Now, screeching to a standstill. A wall of cold, unyielding asphalt is slowly rising up to meet me. It reeks of blood.

Maybe, just maybe, I do have a voice in this world. Maybe I've found it after all the searching. Sometimes, actions speak louder than words. Way louder. My mother will be proud of me today. Today, she'll know that I care. So will that little girl.

I guess I finally made a friend. And I finally *said* something to her, too.

That last thought made me really happy.

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