



# ***DARK ROOM***

By  
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The man who came into our car in Khusaaz that night, had wrapped himself charily in a navy blue raincoat and had pulled down the long edges of his hat to his forehead, as though he wanted to separate from outside and from any communication with people. He held a package and when he sat in the car, he used his hands to guard it. For half an hour that we were sitting near each other in the car, he didn't take part in the discussion going on between the driver and other passengers. So he had made a hard impression on them. Each time that the light of another car or any outer source of light illuminated the inside of our car, I would look at his face stealthily: he had a pale white complexion, a slender nose with his eyelids drooping tiredly. A deep furrow would be seen on the two sides of his lips that showed the power of his will and determination, as though his head was carved out of stone. Every now and then, he would lick his lips with the tip of his tongue and he would go back to his thoughtful position again. Our car stopped in front of Madani's garage In Khanssar. Although we were supposed to drive all the night, the driver and all of the passengers got out of the car. I looked at the garage and the coffee shop and none of them seemed hospitable. Then I went near the car and to make sure for myself, I asked the driver, "It seems we have to stay here for the night?"

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Yes, the road is awful, so it is better stay to here for the night and set off at dawn. Then, I saw the person wrapped in the raincoat is walking to me, and with a low voice he said, "There is no place to stay, if you don't have anywhere or anybody else in mind to stay with, you may come to my place."

"Thank you so much, but I don't want to make any trouble for you."

"I'm not fond of 'honeyed phrases". I neither know you nor like to know you. Neither do I wish to make you indebted to myself. but, since I have made the room of my own taste for myself, my previous room is useless. I think that it would be more comfortable than this coffee shop."

His frank tone impressed me and I found out that I was not dealing with an ordinary man. So I said, "very well, I'll come with you". And without any hesitation I followed him. He took out a torch from his pocket and turned it on. A column of repulsive light radiated before our feet. We walked through a few curvy alleyways, and passed amidst mud walls. It was quiet. A kind of peace and numbness penetrated one, and I could hear the sound of water and feel a cool breeze passing over the trees and touching our faces. The lights of some houses were twinkling from afar. We walked silently. In order to make a conversation with my unknown friend, I said: "It should be a pleasant city".

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He seemed to have been frightened from my voice. After a pause, he said “Among all of cities that I have seen in Iran, I just liked Khansaar. Not because there are many fields and fruit trees and plenty of water here, but because it has kept its original ambiance; because the atmosphere of the old alleyways is still residing amidst its clay houses and its tall quiet trees and because it is still possible to smell its scent. It has not yet lost its hospitable, intimate impression. It is rather remote and forsaken, and this makes it more poetical; the newspapers, automobiles, airplanes and railway are among the calamities of this age. Particularly automobiles that with their horns and the dust they produce, they can take away the spirit of the driver’s errand boy to the most remote villages, and they can dump any parvenu ideas or awkward nasty tastes and the most stupid kind of imitation into every possible hole! He projected the light of the torch on the windows of the houses and said: “can you see, how these inlaid windows have separate houses? One can feel the smell of the soil, the scent of harvested alfalfa, the odor of the vulgarity of life, the sound of crickets and small birds, the old simple and sly people, all these remind one of the lost old world and take one away from the clamor of the world of the nouveau rich!

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Then, he suddenly realized that he was my host, he asked, “Have you had dinner”?

“Yes, we had dinner in Gholpaygan.” We passed by a few small rivers and then he opened the door of a garden near a mountain and we went in. We arrived at the entrance door of a newly built house. We stepped into a small room. There were a small portable bed, a table and two chairs. He lit an oil lamp and left for the other room and brought another lantern to light. Then he opened the package he was carrying. And he brought out a red conical bulb and put it on the lantern. After a pause, as though he was unsure of something, he asked: ‘let’s go to my private room.’ He picked up the lantern; we passed through a narrow dark hallway with an arched ceiling that looked like a cylinder. The arch and the walls were painted ocher and the floor was covered with red rug. He opened another door and we entered a space appearing like an oval room, with no opening except the door that led to the hallway. The room was built with no geometrical angles and lines and its entire surface area from the walls to the ceiling and the floor, were all covered with a brownish orange velvet. Due to the diffused heavy scent present in the room, I couldn’t breathe easily. He put the red lantern on the table and sat on the bed situated in the middle of the room and made a gesture at me.

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I sat on a chair near the table. There was a glass and a jar of milk on the table. I was looking around the room with astonishment. I was thinking that I have definitely been captured by one of those sick crazy people and this should be the room where he tortures his subjects and he has decorated it with the color of blood to conceal his crimes and there was not a single opening in it to be able to shout for help! I was waiting to experience a sudden blow of a wand hitting my head or to be attacked by a knife or an axe once the door was closed. However, with the same gentle voice, he asked, "How do you find my room?". "Room? Excuse me I feel like we are sitting in a plastic bag." Without paying attention to what I said, he continued, "My food is milk, would you like some too"? "No thank you, I have had dinner". He put the jar and the glass in front of me. I didn't feel like drinking any milk, nevertheless I poured a glass and drank it. Then he poured the remaining milk in his glass and drank it slowly rubbing his tongue over his lips. his lips glistened, his eyebrows were lowered in a painful way as though he was searching for some memories.; His young pale face, his smooth short nose, his fleshy lips seemed quite sexy under that red light. He had a tall forehead with a visible dark vein on it. His brown hair was hanging down on his shoulders.

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As though talking to himself he said, 'I have never shared other people's pleasures. A kind of hard or desperate feeling has always inhibited me – the pain of life, life's imperfections. But the most important of these imperfections is to catch up with people, with the evil of a corrupted society, the evil of food and clothes. All this constantly prevents the awakening of our true being. There was a time that I joined others, I wanted to imitate them, but then I realized that I was merely making a fool of myself. I tried all that which is considered pleasure. I realized that other people's pleasures are of no good to me. Everywhere I felt like an outsider. I had no relationship with people. I couldn't change myself to fit into their way of life. I always told myself one day I would escape society and isolate myself in a village or in a remote place. But I did not wish to make isolation an instrument of attainment of fame or money. I did not wish to conform to another person's thoughts or imitate anybody. Finally I decided to build a room of my own taste, a place where I could be myself, a place where my thoughts would not wonder about. "I have been born lazy. Labor and toil belong to empty people; in this way they want to fill a hole in themselves. It belongs to hungry beggarly ignoble people.

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But my ancestors, who were empty inside, labored a lot and toiled a lot, and reflected a lot and observed a lot and passed their time in idleness a lot. Such hole was filled in them and I became the sole heir of their idleness. I do not feel proud of them. In addition, in this country, social classes do not exist as they do elsewhere and if you dig into the family history of any members of the present nobility and royalty, you will see that a few generations before, they were thieves, or bandits or brokers or court clowns. In any case, if we trace our descent even further we will reach some odd chimpanzees or gorillas. The point is that I have not been born to work. Only the modern nouveau rich can present themselves in such ambiance, as they put it themselves. In the society that they have made according to their own taste and avarice and lust, one has to swallow like a capsule all those compulsory laws and commitments in regard to even the most insignificant duties of life! The captivity that they call work and the right to live should be begged from them! In such environment only a bunch of thieves, shameless sick stupid people have the right to live and if one is not a thief or mean or sycophant, they would say, "He is not worth living!" They could never understand the pains I was suffering and the burden of the heritage weighing on my shoulders!



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The exhaustion of my ancestors was surviving in me and I could feel the nostalgia of the past within myself. I wanted to creep into a hole like hibernating animals, to indulge in my own darkness and mature there. For just as a photographic film is developed on a piece of glass in the darkroom, those gentle things concealed in one are all suppressed as the result of toils and labors, hubbubs and clamors and the brightness of life and death. It is only in darkness and silence that one thrives. That darkness was me and futilely I willed to overcome it. My only regret is why I wasted so much time following others. Now I realize that the most important part of me has been this very darkness and silence. This silence is found in the essence of any creature, and only when we withdraw from the apparent world, in seclusion and return to ourselves, does it manifest itself. But people always try to escape this darkness and isolation, to keep their ears closed to the sound of death and to destroy their personality and make it vanish in the clamor of life! Unlike Sufis I do not wish 'the light of truth to be manifest in me.' Just the opposite, I am expecting the fall of the devil, I like to awaken in myself the way I am. I am disgusted with the shining empty sentences of intellectuals and I do not wish to lose my personality for the sake of dirty needs of this life based and operated on the aspirations of the thieves and smugglers.

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and dirty stupid worshippers of gold. It is only in this room that I can live in myself and not waste my energy; this darkness and red light is essential for me. I can not sit in a room where there is a window behind my head. It is as though it makes my thoughts scatter, and I do not like light. Everything looks ordinary and banal under the sunshine. The sources of beauty are fear and darkness. A cat is such an ordinary thing in the light of the day, but its eyes shine and its hair glitter and its movement seem mysterious in the darkness of the night. A flower bush that is ailing and covered by cob-web in the daytime finds a significance of its own at night, as though some secrets revolves around it. Light awakens and supports all living creatures, but it is in the darkness and at night when every life, every ordinary thing finds a mysterious air, and all the lost fears are awakened. In darkness one sleeps, but one hears; the actual person is awake and the true life begins only then. One no longer calls for the petty needs of life and soars into the spiritual worlds; one remembers all the things that one never knew". After this eloquence, he fell silent. It was as though with this lecture he meant to exonerate himself. Was he the bored child of a rich family, tired of living, or was he afflicted with some strange malady? In either case, he did not think like an ordinary human being.

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I was perplexed. How to react to all this? The line at the side of his lip had hardened and a dark vein had appeared on his forehead. When he talked, his nostrils flared. Under the red light, his pale face looked tired and melancholy--quite at odds with the face I had seen in the automobile. When he lowered his head, a fleeting smile would touch his lips. Then, as if suddenly realizing it, and throwing me a sarcastic look, he said, "You are traveling and must be tired. I monopolized the conversation!"

"We all talk about ourselves. We are the only truth that ever existed. We talk about ourselves quite involuntarily, even when we express our feelings and observations in someone else's words. The most difficult thing is to express oneself in exactly the terms one should."

I wished that I had not ventured a reply. What I had said was quite meaningless, useless and out of place. I don't know what I was trying to prove. Perhaps I was indirectly flattering my host. But he, without paying me any attention, gazed painfully in my direction. Once again his eyelids closed. And, as if in a different world, ignoring me altogether, he continually rubbed his tongue along his moistening lips. He was saying, "I always wanted to design and build a place of my own. Houses and rooms built by others did me no good."

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I wanted to be by myself and delve into myself. To this end I turned all my wealth into hard cash. Then I came here and had this room built according to my own specifications. I brought all these velvet curtains with me. I have personally attended to every detail in this room. The only thing that I had forgotten was a red lampshade. I sent the design and the size to Tehran. They made me one, and today I went and picked it up. That's why I was traveling; otherwise I don't leave my room and try not to mingle with people. As for food, I have placed myself on a milk diet. Since I can drink it sitting or lying down, I'm spared the trouble of preparing meals. I should also say that I have vowed to take my life the moment I run out of money or the moment that I feel a need to return to society. This is the first night that I will sleep here in my own room. I am that lucky man whose every earnest wish is fulfilled. A lucky man! How difficult it is to envisage such a being. I could never have imagined this state. Yet, right now, I am a happy man!"

Once again all became silent. To break the silence I said, "The state you are seeking is that of the fetus in the mother's womb where, without need for struggle, flattery or coping, one can lie in the red, cozy organ, feed on the mother's blood and enjoy the fulfillment of wishes and needs without any effort. Or perhaps you are seeking that lost paradise which rests in every man's subconscious, that

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place where everyone lives by himself and in himself. Then again, perhaps you are looking to make a voluntary death?" As if he didn't expect anyone to interrupt this private discussion, he cast me a sarcastic look and said, "You are traveling. You'd better go and get some sleep!"

He picked up the oil lamp and led me to the hallway and showed me the room we had passed through when we first entered the house. It was past midnight. I inhaled a deep breath of the fresh air, as though I had left a sick cellar. Stars were shining in the sky. I thought "Am I dealing with an obsessive lunatic or an extraordinary person?"

The next day I woke at about ten. To say goodbye to my host, I went into the corridor and, like an infidel approaching a temple, gently rapped on the door. The corridor was dark and silent. Stealthily I entered the room. The light on the table was still burning. My host was still in his pink pajamas. He was lying in the fetal position and his hands covered his face. I approached him and shook him by the shoulder. He had become petrified in this position. Terrified, I left the room and went to the bus terminal--I did not want to miss the bus. Had he run out of money, as he had said? Or, afraid of the loneliness he had so eloquently praised, had he, for that last night, wished to have someone with him? Or perhaps he was a lucky man who had wanted to keep his good luck to himself and this place was his ideal room!

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