

Writing sample

Extract from my book "Voyage d'Une S'habael: La fin d'une enfance"
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Context: Nimÿe has been in this foreign country as a doctor for a while now, and she still has some issues with the social rules. Knowing that she is from a more open-minded place than hers, the Princess of the Realm came to ask for her help, as she found herself pregnant by accident.

Characters:

Nimÿe: Main character, Healer.

Annia: Nimÿe's best friend.

Elen: The pregnant Princess.

Gina: Elen's Maid.

Roy: Nimÿe's wolf with which she has a powerful psychic connection.

Eläw: A wild wolf that Nimÿe nursed back to health after an injury.

Shah: Kind of the Realm.

" Chapter 32: The Silence "

[...]

I finish mixing up my products and transfer the result into a small bottle for more discretion. I slip it into my pocket and turn to Annia. She understands my nod without me saying a word. We leave my bedroom to go to Elen's. The hallways are silent, as the night is already advanced.

A young brown-haired woman with chestnut eyes opens the door for us. She is wearing an expensive dress, but not as much as the Shah's daughter's. She introduces herself:

"Good evening, I am Gina. Elen's maid."

She welcomes us into the room, as I leave Roy outside to watch the hallway.

"Nimÿe. And here is my friend Annia."

Elen is sitting on the bed in her nightgown, looking gloomy. I hear the door closing behind me and get closer to the bed, followed by Annia.

"Are you ready?"

She shrugs, full of sorrows. Then she looks at me and nods in silence. I take her hand and press it gently between mine. I really don't know what she's going through right now, but at least I can try to understand. All of this opens my eyes on the pressure young people are under in this country. I look through my bag and take out a small wooden stick. I hand it to her together with the mixture I've prepared.

"It will begin a few minutes after ingesting that."

"What is the stick for?"

"It's to bite on. It's going to be painful and I don't want you to scream. Your family is in bed. If they heard you they would rush here. And we really don't need that."

She nods and points to a pile of cloth.

"Gina brought clean cloth, for... you know. That."

She lowers her head slowly. I don't say anything and simply go take some of them to put near me. With a simple hand gesture I instruct Gina to come closer to Elen.

"Whenever you want, Elen." I say.

Gina comes closer and sits on the bed beside her. Elen leans back on her pillow and opens the bottle with a shaky hand. I can feel her hesitating. I hope for a second that she might change her mind and give this baby a chance. Her eyes fill up with tears. She puts her hand on her mouth to smother her cries. Gina seems uncomfortable, she doesn't really know what to do; she ends up putting a hand on her shoulder. Elen looks at her as if she was looking for an answer. But her maid isn't really helpful. She then turns to me. I want to tell her to stop. But this is not my decision. This is not my country, this is not my culture nor my society. Elen knows the rules of this world far better than I do. If she was a young healthy woman from my home, with a healthy baby on the way, I would have said something. But I have no right to do so here. Right now, in this situation, I just move my head slowly, confused and sad.

"This is your decision, Elen. This is about your life."

She sniffs and wipes her eyes. Her hands are still shaky, but she swallows the mixture in one sip. She puts the empty flask on the nightstand and leans back against her pillow. She takes the stick and slips it slowly between her lips. She starts to bite, and almost with grace and elegance, she hands her hand to Gina to ask her to hold it. In the corner of my eye, I see Annia waiting in the shadows, in silence. I turn again to Elen, then I stand up and go to the end of the bed, waiting for the mixture to work.

The contractions start a few minutes later. Elen is already tightening Gina's hand. I take my designated seat with a heavy heart. I helped women give birth before, but this had nothing to do with what is happening right now. Usually, I have to yell my instructions, and the close family of the woman is there for her. Or at least the woman's mom or her life partner. There are screams, encouragement, cheers. Everything goes fast. There is blood sometimes, it's true, but I never had to deal with anything serious so far. It's always an ecstatic, happy, moment.

Here, now, everybody is sad. Elen is crying, and furiously biting on the stick, expelling this unwanted life. Gina has her eyes fixed on her, in a deadly silence. Annia is nothing but a ghost in the room. She waits for me to fall apart. Elen is strong. She has to be. She is the one who has to be the strongest here. Not a scream. But a lot of tears. I hold back mine. I have been for a long time now. I watch for the baby's arrival and I see a tiny head appearing. Nobody says anything. Nobody screams. Nobody cheers. Even Elen's cries are silent now. And there isn't the scream. The scream that everybody awaits. We will never hear it. Not tonight. Not today.

The baby is tiny. Like I was expecting, it is too weak and too under-developed. It tries to breathe, but nothing happens. It dies slowly, peacefully, carefully wrapped in a clean cloth. I quickly cut the cord, to separate Elen from this child forever. Annia gets close, thinking that I am about to fall apart. But I hold on. I have to, for now. I hand her the child without a word. She takes it and covers its face. We don't want to see it. Nobody wants to see it.

I check on Elen quickly, to see if she's at least physically healthy. She is. Everything went well for her. I put her nightgown back on her properly and get out of the bed. She has taken the stick out of her mouth of course, and she has put it on the nightstand next to the empty flask. She stares at the ceiling. Her silent tears seem to endlessly roll on her cheeks. I come close to Gina and put my hand on her shoulder. In my home in this situation I would ask the mother if she wants to see the child one last time. But I doubt that Elen would even want that.

"Make sure she eats properly, and gets a lot of rest. Change the sheets, help her take a bath. It's all you can do for her for now..."

She nods and turns to her friend. I get up and join Annia, taking back my bag on my way. We go towards the door now, to take care of the hardest part of the evening. Elen's broken voice rises behind us.

"Nimÿe..."

I turn around.

"Yes?"

Silence. It seems hard for her to articulate properly.

"Girl? Or boy?"

I pinch my lips and grit my teeth.

"A boy... it was a boy."

"Elvil. His name is Elvil."

I nod and smile slightly, even if she can't see it.

"It's a nice name."

She nods and goes back to her silent cries. I open the door, and Roy comes right away to snuggle against my legs, crying in his own way. I pet his head and ask him to be quiet for now. He stops, but keeps looking at me with his big sad eyes. Annia closes the door behind her, holding the tiny baby with one arm. I listen to the castle around us. Everything seems quiet. I find my way to the gardens, grabbing a candle-light in a hallway.

We go through the gardens, and reach the forest. Then we walk for several minutes again.

"Nimÿe, we walked enough..."

Annia's voice brings me back to reality. I could have walked for hours without stopping. I look at her, then slowly turn and look around. Looking for a good place for him. But there is no good place. There are some beautiful places, of course. But not one that would be "good". Because no child deserves to be buried in such a place. Annia sees that I can't seem to be able to take a decision and walks towards a pretty little grove. I follow her and put the lamp down beside her.

"Did you... take something to dig?"

I think. For a long time. And I realize. I fall apart and start to cry.

"Nimÿe... it's... it's fine. We can ask Roy to do it."

I nod without being able to speak. My Roy understands what I need from him and starts to dig. Then, I feel a presence. Strong and reassuring. I look above my shoulder to see Eläw standing there. He must have felt my distress and came close to sit next to me. I look around us and see a dozen pairs of eyes glowing in the dark of night, which would look menacing for anyone. But not for me. All those souls are reassuring and appeasing me. Annia looks around to try and see what I'm looking at. She understands how bad I feel now, and gently puts down the inanimate body in the freshly dug hole, then comes close to me and holds me in her arms. She doesn't say anything, there is no need. We stay like that for a few minutes.

"Do you want to say something?"

I pull away from her and look at the small pile of cloth in the hole. Then Annia again.

"I can't find anything to say."

"Then let's get away from here."

She bends over and closes back the hole with her bear hands. Once it's done, she flattens the ground and puts rocks on top of it to mark the grave.

"It's done. Come on."

She wipes her hands on her trousers, takes the light and stands up. She hands me her hand to help me get up. Holding each other's arm, we walk back to the Castle. Now, I just want to forget.