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The Unknown Child // Masnoon Majeed

There exists an image in my mind. An image of a five-year-old child. He has dark brown skin and big wide brown eyes. In those eyes live a hopeless energy, a satisfied sorrow and an evil despair. These emotions flood anyone who dares to make eye-contact with him. He is rather short for his age. He appears solely on the streets.

I was about six years old. It was a dark winter morning. The smog of the city blurred her divisions. I was looking closely outside the window of my car, unsure of what I was doing. Maybe, I was trying to find a distant star somewhere hidden in the darkness of the winter day. Maybe, my aim was to forget that I was being transported in a boxed and four-wheeled vehicle called a car.

Something struck the car window, right in my face. Something real. It made a loud sound but no wound. The sound disturbed me. Someone had thrown a stone at my car. I looked deeper into the horizon. I did not look any farther but just looked deeper. I found the unknown child. His big wide brown eyes instilled a fear in me. They looked at me, and I noticed his wide evil smile. His dress was poor but his spirits were rich. Probably, he was the son of a beggar but he assumed himself as the son of an emperor. He was laughing like the general who crushed his foes in a one-sided battle. The sense of loss started to boil in my soul but it cooled down as quickly as it had emerged.

We were not on different sides. I was on his side, and maybe he was on mine. I did not want him to not throw the stone. Why was he on the streets throwing stones while I were to go to school? Maybe, there were no differences between the two children, me and him. The difference lay in the location. I was in the car, and he was in the street, and I did not like that.

I met him again about 7 years later. It was a breathlessly hot summer afternoon. I was standing at the edge of my roof waiting for either the crucifixion for my sins or the titanic life to hit an iceberg. Being 13 years old, I had questions in my mind. If I had no meaning in life, then was my life even worth living? What is the point to life? What is if I do not deserve to live? Questions which bred questions and never any answers. I did not have answers. It

seemed like life was not worth living.

But I saw someone, someone who seemed to have jumped time. He was still five-years-old. This time he had lost his evil smile. It had been replaced by a dire somberness. I could listen to his cries. He was standing there, under the scorching summer sun, on a donkey cart. The driver of the cart was lashing the donkey. He was crying. I could almost touch his tears, and feel his pain. At that point, he snatched futility from my life, and shoveled aim into it. He made me decide that maybe life is not worth living for myself but I have to live for him. After all, I had resolved to help him once...

Maybe, he is just a creation of my imagination and mom's stories about the "bad-behaved impoverished -- bad -- children," but he appeared frequently in my life. Maybe, my mother did not want me to be him. Maybe, I did not become him. But I did not want him to be him either.

I wanted him to be me. I envied my own life. I feared for his existence, hated that he could not have mine. Maybe that is why that day under the scorching summer sun, I decided to live for him rather than for me.

What is he doing now? Maybe, he is just waiting to haunt my life again if I ever get freed from his slavery. Maybe, he will be right back in my face when I will forget him.