



"YOU amaze me and quite frankly infuriate me. You have a phenomenal understanding of the world around you. You possess enviable talents and you know so much. You are a visible foreigner and in spite of all the prejudices and hardships you have earned such a position of respect in this competitive society. You can deal with awe-inspiring complexities and yet, again and again, you demonstrate blindness to some simple causalities. I must confess, in all my years of practice I have never seen such a grown-up child as you. How can such pragmatic maturity and immature idealism reside in the same person for so long? How can someone who cannot maintain the health of his own body be dreaming to cure the ills of humanity? What is wrong with you, anyway? Why do you worry so much about things that are beyond your control? For that matter, way beyond any individual's control! Why have you taken the burden of the whole world on your shoulders? You endlessly plan utopias. You pick up hopeless global causes. You shed tears over what happens in the far-away lands. If you were to keep worrying about those places why did you leave in the first place? ...", Dr Qazi's voice carried on as the semi-dressed middle-aged man, sitting on the examination table with his weak legs dangling on one side, felt another one of the dizzy spells coming. A shiver went through his body. His head was burning and feet frozen. A sense of impending doom possessed him. Though he wanted to answer at least the last of the doctor's questions, the question that had hurt like a dagger thrown at the very heart of his being, he couldn't. His mouth went dry and in a faint shaky voice he testified, "You are right Dr Qazi, I quite agree with you, I must listen to your advice". "Not only listen, you must also act on it", the power in the voice was obvious.

Nervously, Zameer waited in the office. He surveyed the room where he expected a judgement to be pronounced on his life. The wall behind the doctor's leather-covered high-back chair was plas-

## Plastic Heart

tered with framed symbols of his authority. All degrees and awards were displayed except the ones he received from his home country. On one side was the wall of books on bodies and their diseases. On the other side, the big window was covered with white venetian blinds that seemed permanently shut. On the wall to wall counter below the gallery of diplomas there were a plastic heart, a transparent stomach, and a skull sliced into two and opened up. The sequence of display ended with a grotesquely framed picture of the doctor's European wife and their two children. Neatly arranged on the large desk were a tray of anonymous files and a black box presumably hiding yet another medical device.

Dr Qazi walked in muttering expressions of disgust. He closed the door behind him, went around his desk and placed himself in his chair. Though a short man, he looked very tall in that setting. With an anger that seemed to uncontrollably burst forth, he started saying, "This woman! She has been my patient for ten years. She is a hyperactive, obsessive, compulsive type; cannot spend a day without protesting for a cause or confronting an imaginary enemy. She wants to make up for all the wrongs that, she is convinced, have been done to women, blacks, Chicanos, Cambodians, whooping cranes and whales. A hopeless dreamer with uncontrollable energy. A beautiful person but caught in such ugly pattern. She takes pills to calm her nights and incessantly puffs on cigarettes to create a rhythm in her chaotic days. I have been telling her to slow down but she accuses me of laying my bourgeois biases on her. Now she has ominous spots in the chest X-ray. She was crying as I left her. Strange person!"

Zameer felt this strong urge to break out of the doctor's office if only to tell her not to cry, not to feel alone in her journey, not to abandon her ideals. His body refused to obey his thoughts and Dr Qazi's voice nailed him into his chair, "Well! Let us forget about her. We have our own serious business to deal with here. I hope you understand that I am gravely concerned about your situation. You have been coming to me with increasing frequency. And I must say that we have been treating your symptoms and not bothering to go to the real underlying causes. Now that I have all the X-rays, laboratory results and the consultants' reports in front of me, it does not look very good. We see all the signs of at least two, if not three systemic disease patterns..." He first

brought the plastic heart forward and took it apart to explain what was happening. Slowly other models appeared also and the lecture on diseases went on. The more he heard the less he listened. Lifeless and despondent he sat there staring at the plastic objects with red, blue and pink tubes, nodding in fake attention. He startled as the doctor started to conclude his verdict, "... the prognosis is not good. We will have to contend with very high risks of organ failures and the way your vision has been going, possibly blindness a few years down the line. We can perhaps slow down the process but you must abandon your present life style. And I don't need to explain once more what I mean. Relax and enjoy yourself. But if you must work for Islamic cause, why don't you help us a bit in running the mosque. We do need someone who can manage these students who come from old countries and infect our youth with politics of the Muslim world. A person with your knowledge and language skills is needed to reshelve all the books that people leave lying around in our mosque library. Or perhaps you can help us in compiling the directory of Muslims residing in this area. This is an absolute must in order to attain any sense of community in this city..."

He wanted to tell his self-righteous benefactor that expatriate Islamic existence divorced from global Muslim reality is a mirage. He wanted to scream and challenge the deceptive premise that a directory of Muslims will lead to a community of Muslim. But his mouth went dry, and for a few seconds a fog descended over his vision. All he could say was, "You are right Dr Qazi, I must stop all that I am doing. You are so right, after all why should the plight of Muslims in India anguish me to sickness sitting here thousands of miles away. You can put me on any project in the mosque you think is good for me."

Dr Qazi stood up with a triumphant gesture and said, "I am glad we have finally arrived at some understanding. Over all these years I knew that you will come back to work with us in the cause of Islam. We will see you next Friday in the mosque, *Inshallah*."

In service of Dr Qazi's mosque his life reduced to spending tired evenings on regressive and unimaginative projects. Imprisoned in this labyrinth of Islamised pragmatism he felt the slow suffocation of his Islamic ideals. His spirit made the choice that his body was incapable of making. In the directory he had helped produce, there was a line blanked out just before it went to press. ■