

‘The Lover’s Tale as told to Kamila Shamsie’

- Kamila Shamsie

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The story ‘The Lover’s Tale as told to Kamila Shamsie’ is taken from *Refugee’s Tales: Volume 2*. It was modeled on Chaucer’s ‘Canterbury Tales’. The stories set out to communicate the experiences of those who were seeking asylum in UK. These people find themselves detained and went through untold sufferings.

Kamila Shamsie is a Pakistani writer based in Britain. As part of CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), the asylum seeker John shares his experiences to Kamila Shamsie.

John as a young boy had the ambition to become a pilot. He was brilliant in his studies and had all the potential to fulfil his dream. His father was a political financier. He joined the air force and his step brother joined the army. His life took a different turn contrary to his expectations. He was made to go through all the ‘rituals’ like drinking dog’s blood. He was made to work under an army officer to spy on his own people.

John’s step brother was commanded to bring his father. Upon his refusal, his step brother was put in a ‘punishment room’. John was ordered to give him a tablet which was actually poison. His step brother died immediately after taking it. John was upset after this because he could not bear the thought of killing his own brother. After this John was assigned to work in different places. At one time he had to work under the President’s son in his house. The President’s son was with a group of men who brought a young woman to strip her naked just to have fun. As the girl refused to comply with she was put in a room to die. Her brother was brought in to inform him about this punishment to caution other girls. John cried while narrating this unspeakable indignity. He was assigned another job of guarding elderly couple. The couple treated him well and the elderly man treated him like his own son. John looked up to him as his own father. One day soldiers came and shot the couple dead. Actually John was used as a spy to find out about the couple’s son who was hiding. When it did not work they were killed.

After this he fled away for life in a country nearby. He worked as a teacher and on Sundays he went to Church. At that time, he met a girl called Sarah and became intimate with her. He shared his past with her and she brought him food and money. Sarah's father came to know about his daughter's relationship and her pregnancy. He searched for John and arrested him. Sarah arranged a friend, gave him £25 to smuggle John out. Sarah and John fled away from the place.

John met Frank, an American soldier who offered to help in getting visa for John. Frank was able to get him a passport but could not get British visa. John was imprisoned until the case was sorted out. He was released later only to be kidnapped by the President's men. He was put in a room where John found many 'torture things' in many rooms. After going through a lot of pain and suffering he was sent to an army camp of Commandos. This camp was mainly for people who did not have anyone to look after them ('There is no one for you'). The captain of the Commandos army was known to John who met him when he joined Air force. The captain of the Commandos army took pity on him and helped John to escape. The captain was punished for doing this. His hands were dipped in wet cement, allowed to dry and was dropped in the ocean for letting John go.

John met Frank again and he helped John apply for visa with all the necessary details. John met his brother and worked as a kitchen porter. The police arrested him because he was working illegally. He was in the detention center for six months. While in the detention center an Australian worker applied for asylum for John and he was granted asylum. Meanwhile Sarah lived in different places and followed John wherever he went with her three children aged 7, 8 and 11. She was reunited with John and they got married in London church.

John ended up as an undergraduate Math student and hoped to be a teacher waiting for the results. The whole narration was recorded and Kamila Shamsie was told by John that he had to wait for another fifteen years to get citizenship status.

In the midst of brutality and sufferings John was shown kindness by friends, family and strangers. It would take long time for him to erase the trauma of his past life.