

## “Taste of Cherry: A Story on Wanting to Leave and Learning to Stay ”

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I had been going through a season of noise: external, internal, unspoken, and for reasons I couldn't name, I wanted a film that wouldn't speak too loudly. Revisiting *Taste of Cherry* seemed exactly what I was looking for - not to analyze, not to write but to simply sit beside something that had once spoken to me with a quite almost unheard voice that felt like a prayer. A prayer. Not a loud one, not the kind you recite aloud in congregation, but the one you whisper under your breath when only God can hear you.

The air is dry, the roads curve like questions, a car with a man inside is driving through hills of Tehran with one request in mind: “Will you bury me?”. Mr. Badii, the man in the car, is seeking death for reasons unknown to us. There is no backstory on him, no flashbacks, no cinematic unraveling of trauma, no dramatic confession. Only a man, a car, and a silence between them.

Along the way, Mr. Badii meets a soldier, a student, and a taxidermist. But it seems like the real conversation happens between him and the earth. The conversation that can be felt in a dust he so desperately wants to return to, the hills he drives through again and again as if wanting the landscape itself to give him an answer, to accept him. And yet, this story is not about death, it is about the long and quiet moment before it - the time when a person is still there but unsure if they can continue.

A soldier. Young Kurdish boy is the first one that hears Mr. Badii's plea to bury him. As a soldier, he doesn't say too much, he listens with visible unease trying to hide his fear in the silence. Fear of not the man himself but the weight he carries, the pain inside. Then there is the seminarist. With steadier voice he says: “*Since the Hadiths, our twelve imams and the Quran refer to suicide and say that man mustn't kill himself. God entrusts man's body to him. Man must not torment that body.*” to which Mr. Badii replies: “*I know that suicide is one of the deadly sins. But being unhappy is a great sin too... When you're unhappy you hurt other people. Isn't that a sin too?*”. You can sense that the seminarist wants to help but from a distance - as if giving an answer would be enough to save someone.

Neither of them say yes. And neither of them are cruel in their answers. But both of their refusals reveal something familiar in our world: when faced with someone else's plea for help, how many of us either retreat or recite, and few of us know how to stay?

A taxidermist. An old man with kind eyes and deep voice is the third one to seat in the car with Mr. Badii and listen to his request, and the only one to agree. But before agreeing, he confesses that he too wanted to end his life and begins telling his story. The story of him climbing a tree with a rope in hands. While on the tree, he felt something under his hand. Mulberries. “*I ate one. It was succulent, then a second and third. Suddenly, I noticed that the sun was rising over the mountaintop. What sun, what scenery, what greenery! All of a sudden, I heard children heading off to school. They stopped to look at me. They asked me to shake the tree. The mulberries fell and they felt happy. Then I gathered some mulberries to take them home. My wife was still sleeping. When she woke up, she ate mulberries as well. And she enjoyed them too. I had left to kill myself and I came back with*

*mulberries. A mulberry saved my life. A mulberry saved my life.*” It’s not a preach but a memory of a fruit, the sweetness of which caught him by surprise. A softness in the middle of despair, a relief buried inside the heaviness. A fruit which is a mercy - *rahma* - real, edible that grows from the same earth Mr. Badii wants to return to.

In Islamic tradition, mercy (*rahma*) embodies two important meanings “...the mercy of Allah towards His creation and the encouragement for Muslims to embody this mercy in their actions and dealings with others” (Arabian Tongue, What is the Meaning of *Rahma* in Islam?). The same mercy of God that feeds trees with water and birds with food, that wraps the seed in soil and places sweetness inside a fruit. That day *rahma* was placed in the mouth of an old man who delivered it with softness in his voice and placed it in the ears of a man who lost all of his hope. That mercy is there not to fix Mr. Badii but to remind him, and to all of us, that even in the loneliest hour, the world may still offer something tender. A view. A breeze. A fruit. A stranger.

We never find out what happened to Mr. Badii. There he stands in the grave with darkness and a storm. A storm of thoughts, memories, feelings inside of him. Then the film ends with video footage of Abbas Kiarostami, the director, and a film crew smiling, smoking, choosing the perfect light for a shot as if life continues and people exhale. We are never given the answer to the decision. A man who wanted to die listened to another man speak of a fruit, and then... we do not know. And maybe that is a sign of God’s mercy through film, a sign that even in our heaviest silences there is still a breeze, a fruit, a stranger - something asking us gently to stay.