



CHAINS OF MIND

BY

VESSER SELENE

Dear Elif Shafaq,

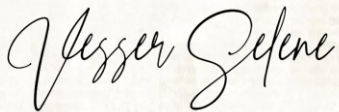
I am pleased to submit my short story, [Chains of mind], for your consideration.

This is about a young woman, haunted by a traumatic past and a monstrous father, escapes her dire circumstances only to face an even more harrowing revelation about her reality and the true extent of her suffering

I have been actively practicing writing novels and stories since my school days, with the dream of becoming a recognized author worldwide. It would be an honour to contribute my work to your esteemed event.

Thank you for considering my submission. I look forward to the opportunity of working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vesser Selene". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'V' being particularly large and stylized.

Vesser Selene

Chains of Mind

When I was younger my mom always warned me about stranger danger. She told me how they could hurt me and kill me if I let them in. She never told me about family danger. She never told me that if given the chance, even family can be worse than any stranger....

If someone enters our house they could feel the air thickened by the stench of fear and despair. after my mother had died from an accident when I was 10, My father who was once a figure of love and protection was now a figure that provoked fear and disgust in me. I was locked up in the room, my every move monitored, and on unfortunate nights like tonight, I was the subject of his hatred and anger. Every day I battled with the monsters in my head and every night I battled for a way to escape from what he was doing to my body.

I tried to escape exactly 32 times. My first attempt ended with multiple broken bones. The second ended with 6 nights tied up on my father's bed unable to even lift a finger and with a sore throat from all the screaming and begging. The third one ended with a week of starvation. After that, each failure resulted in more and more cruel punishment from my father and each punishment made the fire in my heart burn brighter.

One night, when my father was passed out drunk, I took my chances. I moved as quietly as I could, minding all the floorboards that creaked and counting all the steps I took. My heart raced with fear of being caught again, as I slipped out of my father's bedroom window. The cold night air felt like a soft caress of freedom as I ran, not looking back, my bare feet slapping against the pavement.

I didn't know where I was or what time it was. I could feel my legs giving out and my feet bruising from the rigged edges of rocks. My throat was dry and my clothes were soaked. I collapsed against a bench outside a cafe. Unknowingly I could feel tears streaming down my face as I felt hope for the first time in so long.

As the dawn broke and rays of light seeped through the trees of the park, I began hearing the snapping sound of branches before a blonde mop of hair came into my vision. It took me a few moments to register the mop was connected to a head. The head is connected to the body of an old woman.

"You look like you've been through hell," Jenna said gently, offering me a hot drink. Jenna the owner of the café I had ended up that night had taken pity on me and given me a job and a resting place at her home.

"Thank you," I said, my voice barely above a whisper. "I don't know what I would've done without you."

Though it was hard at the beginning, as time passed by, I started finding some semblance of peace in my life. My new job, Jenna, and a few customers I made friends from had now become my family and for the first time in a while, I had started to feel safe in my life.

"You know, you never really talk about where you came from," one afternoon as I was having my breakfast, Jenna said, her eyes full of concern. "Is there something you're running from?"

"It's... complicated. My father, he... he wasn't a good man." I replied, looking anywhere but at her as guilt and shame filled me.

Jenna reached out and took my hand. "You don't have to explain if you're not ready. Just know that I'm here whenever you want to talk"

"Thank you," I said, tears welling up in my eyes. "You don't know how much that means to me."

As days turned to weeks and weeks turned to months, I could feel the shadows of my past seeping into my new life. They would appear as glimpses of my father's face or whispers of his voice. At times, I have nightmares of me back at that house, covered in blood.

One evening as I was preparing dinner, I heard knocks on my front door. I hurriedly opened the door to two cops standing. One cop had his hands on the gun while the other one stopped him with his hands-on top of the first one. Both stared at me with a grim expression.

"Delma Grey?" one of them asked, my heart sank with dread.

"Yes, that's me," I replied, with a tremble in my voice.

"We need to talk to you about your family," the officer said, and I felt cold panic envelop me.

"I.... I don't have a family" I stammered. "my only family was my mother and she died 8 years ago."

"Please let us in," the officer said gently. "We need you to clarify a few things."

I froze at their request but reluctantly stepped aside letting them in. I saw their face pale when they stepped inside.

"Delma, we need you to tell us what happened here," the officer said looking around as if they had seen a ghost.

"What do you mean...." my mind struggled to piece together what was real and what was a nightmare. The house was eerily quiet, as I came to a terrifying realization. The lavender scent of the air freshener I had used earlier had done nothing to dull out the overwhelming smell of death. As my eyes came to adjust to reality, I saw the decaying body of my father, lifeless and covered in maggots. The memories of that night came rushing back, flooding me with horror and guilt as I looked down on my still blood-soaked hands.

That unfortunate night, my father came more drunk than usual, I saw the chance and attacked him with the empty glass on my bedside. It shattered on his head and all I could see was red. I took a piece of the glass and stabbed him in the side of his neck. I stabbed and stabbed and stabbed. I stabbed till my whole face was covered in his blood. Thick, disgusting blood of a monster.

"No," fear washed over me. "No, this can't be real."

"I'm sorry, Delma," the officer said softly. "But it is. We found your family's bodies. They've been here for weeks."

"I didn't... I couldn't have..." my voice broke, as I tried to grasp reality in front of me "I escaped. I know I did. I live with Jenna, I worked at the café."

"Delma," the officer said, his voice gentle but firm, "there is no Jenna in this town.... And this is your father's house. You don't have a job."

"No, no, no," I unconsciously started rocking back and forth. "This isn't happening."

"It's over, Delma," the officer said, reaching out to her. "Let us help you."

As the officers led me to the car, I could feel reality setting in. I remembered my father who had taken care of me when I was diagnosed with a mental illness. He had begged in the court, spent hours going back and forth, and finally got permission to take care of me at home after I had accidentally started the fire that killed my mother. The father who had tried to save me from myself. I had his blood on my hands. I used to be a prisoner of my mind, and now I'll forever be haunted by the ghosts of my parents and chains of my own making.