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LETTER TO MY HUSBAND

New

I

We lived in an old, cramped chalet, a small abandoned kiosk, stripped of the few boards that covered it, the sheets were tiresomely perforated that we could not escape any bad weather, the rain, the sun visited us full time without permission to the point that I constantly wondered if we were fleeing hostilities somewhere to camp there or if this was really the plan that my father, with his engineer of course, had designed for our home.

And that morning again, an unprecedented light penetrated the holes in the ceiling, on the floor where I lay down on my tired mat the cold gnawed at my sleep despite the warmth of the father who slept soundly over his shoes that he took as a pillow above which he abandoned his head. So I hurried to wake up this big body that groaned with fatigue, despair and the disgust he felt especially for his easy job that brought him almost nothing.

It was the first day of school, I had difficulty finishing the previous years and with faith I hoped to start this one. My father got up, with a worried air, saw that I was getting ready for a new year. He kept under his shoe bag my three notebooks and my faded uniform that I had worn for four years, the shoes of his customers that he stored somewhere there since he was a shoemaker. I shed tears as he took care of me, as he deprived himself of everything to assume his paternity, especially as he was both father and mother...

- Stanislas, you might be late, my son!

- Don't worry, Dad, but do you have an old pair of shoes for me? I don't even have slippers to wear.

His face expressed a strong emotion that seized him, he quickly searched his shoe bag from which he took out a pair of worn shoes which did not suit me, in the meantime I put my notebooks in a market bag which served as a briefcase, I tied my trousers with a lace which hung freely on my feet... And he accompanied me to the main street where I followed the path on foot.

My classmates passed me by as if they didn't know me and were all ashamed to walk around with a child as badly shod and badly dressed as me. My appearance told even to passers-by, even to the inhabitants of nature that I was a faithful supporter of poverty. I suffered from the solitude and isolation that were reserved for me at school, my father

warned me about all this in spite of it, I suffered from the inequalities that I experienced, above all I suffered from the involuntary poverty that made me wallow in my sad fate. The arms of my school were wide open, welcoming several heads dressed in the beauty of the first day. The mass came aboard rolling vehicles, either private or those of the school. Some of the children accompanied by their parents, some like me came on foot but certainly not in the same macabre allure that I wore.

Suddenly, a colleague who was accompanied by a pretty young lady came to my reception and said:

- Hello! Son of the Doctor! Then he laughed out loud.

His campaign ran his contemptuous gaze along my body and said: "Is that a Doctor's son?"

- Yes, Doctor of shoes! The colleague replied, then they both laughed as if to mock the mediocrity I presented to them.

My day started as badly as that, in class everyone refused to sit next to me, some said that I would dirty them, others confided that I stank, others affirmed that it is even inconceivable that a son of any dignitary sits with that of a doctor and not just any doctor, "a shoe doctor." The teacher decided that they leave me the place near the window so that my supposed smell would be expelled outside. After which, a lull intensified in the room and the teacher advanced the schmilblick of her homily, suddenly the headmistress entered the room with a stern look and asked: "where is Stanislas Kamitatu?" I fearfully raised my little finger to indicate my place and her attitude gave to whoever wanted the power to boo me once again.

"Look at that dirty thing," she said, "pick up your trash and go home and tell your father that school is not an orphanage, we're tired of taking care of you here."

A questioning silence invaded the lips of the entire room and the director spoke again:

- For all these years you have not given a penny, school is not made for ambassadors of poverty, even less for profiteers of knowledge like you, go away!

A river of tears snaked down my cheeks, my heart was clothed in distress, my mind in stress and my vision plunged into uncertainty. On my heavy steps I painfully left the room under the jeers of my wealthy colleagues. The incumbent tried to console me to lighten the belts that strangled my destiny, but in vain.

Clearly, for us the world was a hell that we wanted to air-condition at all costs, I didn't understand why we lived in a kiosk and our neighbors in villas, why we only ate in the

evening at the same time as the neighbors' children threw bread instead of stones when they teased each other, or especially why the others have a father and a mother and I have the opposite...

From afar, I could see my old father dying of laziness on his shoe bag, I imagined the anguish he would have if he heard from me, despite my twelve years of age I put myself in his shoes and felt the burden that weighed on him. When he saw me coming, he welcomed me with joy then slipped into my hands some sandwiches that he had reserved for me and introduced me to a series of questions.

- The first day is also short son, what did you learn today? How do you like your new class? The homeroom, it suits you, right?

His joyful air, his expectation of a favorable response from me, made me eternally doubt whether to announce the reality that was pursuing me. A short circuit of pity crossed my heart, but with force I held my speech:

- Nothing, Dad, then nothing. He crossed the wrinkles on his face again, then removed his lips from his smile and asked me to explain. I recounted without forgetting anything, the same words, the same gestures of the headmistress, and well, these were the source of his disenchantment. As if he were lying down properly, getting up abruptly then sitting down again; as if he were looking for what he had lost, then remembering that he had lost nothing, he spoke about himself in a language elsewhere that he had never taught me and in the end I only heard: "that's the world."

It was painful for me to swallow my last sandwich because of the state my poor father was in, after a total silence, he started walking again and addressed me:

- My son, Stanislas, I no longer have any reason to call you a child, you have grown up enough by the fact that you have experienced the flavor of the world.

You see, we are all born of a woman, grow up with her and it is the same woman that we marry. Also, we are all born naked, with nothing, we fight for everything and we carry on with nothing.

The world is made of inequalities, these then offer a certain harmony within the structure of a social class. I have to be here so that the shoes of senior officials are well maintained, I have to be here so that passers-by find a shoe shiner available although this is not the life I can wish for you as a parent. But, you will not forget one thing, tomorrow is a secret, the life of a man is a chameleon that changes colors at every moment.

His words affirmed me in a new hope, and for the first time I thought of expressing my great anxiety:

- Dad, where is mom?

He seemed to be busy, searched uselessly in his bag from which his hands came back empty, in fact, it was his usual way of avoiding a delicate subject, touched up his beard then said: "You are not old enough, much less charismatic enough to know that now..."

II

Several years passed and our sacred costume: "poverty" was the same. I was growing hair everywhere, my father's hair was already whitening, his back was bending and I saw him approaching his old age. I lived with a hardened bachelor in whom the child's spirit disguised itself. The pretty sugar canes in the neighborhood interested him less than my body also claimed one despite the stinginess of my pockets and the thinness of my dining table...

The worry remained unresolved, and that evening I reassured myself and enlightened myself. My father lay down desperately on his mat; after one, two, sometimes three puffs of his cigar he reflected on the evil that was weighing him down. I came to his

right, placed his ashtray closer to his arm and repeated my eternal question: Dad, where is Mom?

He looked at me as if he wanted to make an intimate confession and approached me with more tender words:

- My son, my Stanislas! He coughed a little and then continued; the life of the present is the result either of the mistakes or of the efforts combined with the past. Every second the world observes a change as much social, cultural, economic as political. Nevertheless, wise is he who does not follow the advice of the wicked and who does not commune with them, wise is he who does not let himself be led by the world and takes the baton of command of his life, life is short, very short...

He took a long silence to properly download all his revealing spirits then continued:

- I had married your mother, yes, according to custom, and she reigned over me until she transformed my home into a small folk village. My ambitions, my ideas were all based on the ancient traditions recommended to us in the past by black society.

I did not understand that it was normal that there could exist between your mother and me a certain equality surely because she was a woman, I accepted that her gender was inferior to mine and her capacities were not even equal to a tenth of mine.

You were only three months old, your mother would have found a job that paid as much as mine, her parents were in agreement that she should work, I castigated this interference that I took for a violation of my authority over my own wife. My reason was that my wife could not receive a salary envelope as big as mine, that she could not work for anyone for fear that she would be stubborn and then boycott my injunctions.

One day I was coming back from my shoemaking workshop, all tired I rushed to the living room to do as usual: shout at your mother since she was objectified for me, insult her without reason before she served me to put under my tooth... By surprise I found a man in a suit and tie, one leg above the other and leafing through one of my newspapers. Arrogance seized me as if I were the first to have a living room, with thoughts that I had without delay, I took the man and I kicked him properly.

Your mother, screaming, came running into the living room and tried to separate us. Her "stop fighting" that she said while trembling seemed to me like injunctions and not supplications, then in anger I gave her a good punch that sent her to the ground and she

fainted. The neighbors who heard this noise called the police and I spent two days in the dungeon.

He stopped, suddenly a series of tears watered his face, lowered his head, then raised it again and continued the story.

My stay in the dungeon was an undeniable life lesson to me, the scenes of my unusual behavior came back to me in memory. The soul and body of the poor woman I tortured, her freedoms that I had long trampled on, stained my conscience and peppered my future with trouble.

The day of my release I thought of sincere reparation and definitive change. It was not easy to reach my home, along the way the big eyes opened on me like on a criminal who escaped from the shackles, apparently everyone knew everything, even the birds booed me. The main door of the house remained ajar, I entered it fraudulently but I was caught by your tears, you were crying at the top of your voice, the tears surrounded your face up to your neck, I called tenderly for your mother but no one answered me. I lifted you up as if to calm you down, suddenly an envelope fell out of your flannel. It was written on the back of the envelope: "letter to my husband." I'm still keeping it, wait for me to get it from my bag.

He took a few minutes to come back with an old, faded envelope which he handed to me and asked me to read the contents.

July 26, 1982

To my husband;

Hello darling! Hoping that the attached letter reaches you in good and due form after your return from the dungeon. I am Meta your wife, writing you with a bleeding heart this letter still in soul and conscience after what I can go through as "tragedy" during all the days spent with you.

By the way, it is with deep regret, being very stunned moreover with incurable wounds in my heart that I announce my departure from your life, I am no longer yours, I no longer love you by saying it out loud. You have long taken my personality at a price, you have objectified me and my femininity was only a funny story with regard to you.

As a reminder, do you remember the heavy and inhuman work to which you subjected me? Do you remember vulgar and demeaning remarks that you made me in front of anyone? I even remind you that you threatened to fire me from the home if I gave birth to a female child. Do you remember my dear friend of your recent baseness in forbidding me to work to the point of beating the boss who was supposed to hire me? I will not talk here about your dietary prohibitions to which I was also accustomed... All this because I was your "wife", I am no longer, from now on I am a "Woman", a being with the same rights and duties as you and let that be known once and for all.

Finally, dear friend, I have not forgotten Stanislas our baby, he will be the only person who will make you think of the evil of the past not so that you drag yourself into the guilt complex, rather so that you learn to correct it upon reading this letter, see you later!

My eyes thinned in my lashes after reading this mysterious discovery, my father was small in his coat and felt sorry for me like a child wanting to approve his innocence. A sudden disgust seized me that I wanted to take leave of him, he noticed it, held my hand, asked me to sit down again and listen to him. He searched his pockets then came back with an object in his hand:

- Do you know what it is?

- It's a lighter, Dad! I answered precisely.

Then, secretly, he searched in his bag for an object with which his hands came back clenched and asked me to guess. I saw a black wick of thread similar to that of the candle and quickly I knew that it could be it. "It's a white candle, I think!"

- Well done son! These two objects with me that you know the role of neither will be the didactic material for what you are going to learn now...

I was curious to experience this lesson, he called my attention.

- This is what I will compare the life of an upright man to: this candle is you and your intelligence, this lighter represents your reasoning which produces the fire on the wick and gives light, this light is wisdom. It will have a double advantage, first it lights your path, then lights the others around you. Be careful son, the life of the absurd man is compared to that of a prisoner locked in a vast cell without light, he can only touch with precision the parts of his body, he sees neither his front nor his back; nevertheless, the life of an intelligent man will be based on past facts. The past remains the only mirror that allows us not to repeat the same mistakes, yes the mistake can be made for the first or second time but still the third time it becomes absurdity or even idiocy. I beg you to

correct these errors son, where you find injustice establish justice, where inequalities reign proclaim equality and parity, where societies are cut by the machete of tribalism and other forms of division preach unity and peaceful cohabitation, thus you will live my son, my Stanislas!

APPENDIX

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