

Narrative Viewpoint Article

Just A Story – a visit to orphanage where children were suspected to be abused

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Lunch was being wrapped up and done away with when the intercom rang, its ring echoing off the walls of the main corridor. Right on time, 2:30 p.m.; a hop-skip to the intercom and there was no question of who was waiting on the other end. All it took was one buzz of the button to open the main gates and let her in. She entered the house with a grave expression, carrying a heavy load with her. She didn't have the bag when she left that morning, 'brought work home again' I assumed to myself. The rest of the afternoon was spent as it usually did, tea, television and so on and so forth.

We settled in the main hall as the sun's dying glow poured through the (French) windows. The big unfamiliar bag came out and from it a bundle of papers roughly bunched together with a withering string. These were different. There was a tenderness that was immediately apparent. A note book and pen followed the bundle. 'This is odd', I thought. She wrote, 'Mahira. Age: 9'.

It had been 2 hours. The rays died down and the chill of late winter night set in. She was now on her 7th page. Each page before had word points scribbled and notes along the margins. Each page was named along with an age jotted on the top. And the 7th one was no different.

There were loose sheets scattered around her in some system she had deciphered to herself. Each sheet had a story, a map drawn on it in the form of figures that appeared to be human, drawn by all the Mahiras. Like any other day, I was just there; present and watching as she went over each sheet, stern faced, knotted eye brows and scribbling away. Gliding her gaze from sheet to note book and back. Curiosity would be an understatement.

'Human Figure Drawing test', she uttered as she looked up at me with a ghost of a smile which disappeared just as immediately as it had appeared. True to her passion and profession, she must've heard my silent inquisitiveness. 'Nadeem's been informed that the kids at the orphanage are being mistreated by the staff and reports of kids' behaviors aren't very positive looking', she continued looking around her at the scatter of color and black and white drawings. 'We've tried talking to them, but they're tongue tied.'

'So you're doing this Human Figure Drawing test so see what's happening?' I asked. She nodded in affirmation and handed me a drawing she had been through. I looked it over and looked back at her questioning. Again without so much as looking back at me she asked me to sit next to her. Cradling the drawing, Mahira's drawing, I carefully settled on an empty patch of carpeted floor.

With the back end of a pen she pointed out, 'see this? Mahira has drawn herself sitting on a chair with a book in her lap.' She took another drawing, Sabiha, age 7, 'and here is an overly long dress, colored in solid with the pencil and the legs or feet are barely visible.' She continued to point out such random, minute details involving shading, posture, positioning, symmetry etc. in the other drawings as I continued to try and understand the significance of Mahira's book and Sabiha's overly long solid black dress.

'They're using these things to cover up they're private parts.' And she didn't need to say anything more. We sat there in a blanket of silence. I looked at them again, the faces of all the Mahiras and Sabihas reflected on those sheets of paper. She kept making her notes.

The stillness was lifted by the ruffling of the sheets being put back into their original pile. She placed them securely into a shiny new folder with immense delicacy. She then handed me her laptop with a new blank document open and ready. 'Just type what I dictate,' she wearily requested. Her voice carried a hint of more exhaustion than normal. But I felt it too.

And so we began; sitting on the carpeted floor of the brightly lit hall of a darkened house in the midst of the blackness of a sleeping city.

Each page was named the same way as the pages of the note book were.

She dictated:

'Mahira. Age: 9

Primary evaluation -

History: Brought in April 2009, 8 months. Rescued from car accident with no serious injuries. No official records found of birth and background. No information available about any family or acquaintances. No concrete recollection of family or residence.

Observation: Resistant to speaking, apprehensive. Jittery body language, constant fidgeting of lower body. Vague, uninterested tone of speaking.

HFD: Incomplete depiction of the human body, Disorganized body schema, lower body not depicted (covers by seating position and book),'

I typed.

She continued, 'Tendency to lie, steal, maladjustment, aggression. Lashing out'.

I hesitated to a pause.

'They're showing maladaptive behavior patterns. And they might have to be relocated because the staff is getting frustrated,' she stated hearing the tapping of the keys come to a halt.

'Why,' was all I managed in the confused haze.

'They are being abuse, so they are acting out -'

'And so they're being reprimanded for it.' I interjected.

It was a statement, my face was burning.

'The acting out in what the world sees. The abuse is behind the scenes,' she calmly explained.

'So now what' I asked defiantly.

'So now we lift the curtains,' she replied, finally looking up at me from the pages of her notes.

'But these children, they're alone. They will have to fend for themselves out there, caution is necessary.

There is no guarantee how much bringing this out in front of the world to see will help or how much it would harm them. They will be judged,' she paused. A deep breath followed as she brushed her hand over her notes and looked over at the window, 'It's a funny world, with funny people.'

The stillness settled in again. We sat on the carpeted floor of a brightly lit hall of a darkened house in the midst of the blackness of a sleeping city.

She dictated and I typed.

In a detailed inquiry, it was found that the children were being subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of two night duty attendants. One of the accused managed to escape. No serious action could be taken on the other due to lack of concrete evidence and was let go without any legal repercussions.

The children underwent therapy to help cope with and overcome the trauma. Regular evaluations are conducted to ensure and assess their and the progress and status of all the other children.

A thought to keep in mind: Child Sexual Abuse has come to grow and flourish in our hypocritical society. It's become a reality and many mistaken it as necessary evil.

This is not how it was supposed to be.