



Survivor voices: In Time You Will Understand

In her quest to give a voice to those that are often forgotten or lumped into an anonymous, faceless mass, Armandine Love Saadio documents the life of a survivor of sexual exploitation and abuse. Her brave and thought-provoking work follows the life of Rita, immersing the reader in the emotional turmoil of her journey, from child to woman. In the following excerpt from her yet-unpublished novel, translated from French to English, we watch Rita struggle with being forced to abandon her dreams and the studies she so loves. Her mother confirms that they were but an illusion, paid for by Uncle Yves, a deposit on a life of submission. The deal is done and her only choice is to comply, or to find the strength to flee...alone and afraid.

This blog post serves as a preamble to her life before trafficking – the abandonment of her studies due to a forced marriage, her father’s incestuous acts and grooming, and an abrupt end to her personal dreams and aspirations. These are some of the elements that are common in the lives of sexually exploited women, unknown to the wider public.

Seeing that her daughter did not react, she shook her for a moment so that she would come back down to earth. But Rita didn't sketch out a single sign in response. Her mother, with the help of an aunt, led her to the room. They laid her down on the bed and brought her to her senses with small massages. Her mother started a conversation to try to explain things to her:

“Why do you put yourself in such a state? You know very well that I have always wanted the best for you and that has not changed. Your father and I found you a good husband. A kind and rich man who will make you happy. So, smile! Dry your tears and come with me to the living room.”

At these words, the girl felt more broken. This was what a good husband amounted to, according to her mother: "a kind and rich man." Feelings didn't count. Neither did the wife's point of view. It all depended on the husband who made the proposal and the parents who gave their consent. This was nothing new, but Rita had no intention of letting it happen. She had a different vision of marriage, and it certainly wasn't that one. If one day she had to get married, she wanted to have her say and that was non-negotiable. “You can not do this to me, mom. You wouldn’t dare...”, she repeated. But her mother retorted: “This is the best thing for you. Believe me!” This sentence sounded like one too many and plunged the girl into unprecedented anger:

“You have no idea what is good for me, mom. If not, you wouldn't have dared to do such a thing to me. You know how important it is for me to finish with my studies and have a job. How do you want me to manage to make people who made fun of you because of me feel ashamed as you have always asked me, if you send me into marriage now? I don't want to get married!”



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Her mother was silent for a while, then politely asked the aunt to go and meet the others in the other room. She came back to her daughter and explained that she absolutely had to agree to marry because she had made a promise and the time to keep it had arrived. Indeed, Rita had been promised at the age of twelve to the same man who had so far financed her studies and who had recently decided to get his wife back. She had done her best to let her go as far as possible with her studies. After obtaining the baccalaureate, she had managed to convince him, and he even agreed that she would get at least one higher certification before the wedding. He had pledged to continue to take care of everything as he had done for years. It was he who had made the choice of the university and had taken care of the registration. But a few months after the start of classes, he'd suddenly changed his mind and wanted the wedding to be organized immediately. She had not been able to do anything this time to convince him to wait again.

"I know it's hard for you. But you must understand me. You were able to go all the way to the baccalaureate. It's not bad for a girl."

Rita listened with a bruised heart. Because she was a girl, the fact that she was able to get a bachelor's degree was a feat according to her mother. If this had come from her father she could still have accepted it, because she had learned to live with his derogatory remarks. But coming from her mother, the pill was too bitter to swallow. She who had praised her so much the merits of the school did not believe in it enough.

"Marriage is much more complex than you think, my daughter. In time you'll understand. You will adapt and you will even end up appreciating your man. There is no injury that time is not able to heal".

Rita, realising her defeat, decided to discover at least the man to whom she will now owe obedience and submission; the answer of her mother crushed her definitively on the carpet: "Uncle Yves...", she said.

It was the worst answer she could get. If she'd heard "Uncle Yves's son", the spark could have perhaps been lit. But "Uncle Yves" was the 'coup de grace'. Her mother was certainly looking to finish her off. The same uncle who had seen her grow up and who seemed to be the same age as her perverted dad; the same uncle who affectionately called her "My dear" and slipped her banknotes, asking her to give the best of herself at school; the same one who came every time Dad wanted her studies to stop and everything worked out like magic... Everything was finally explained! Rita burst into tears: "Not him... Not him, mom...someone else maybe...but not him...", she begged desperately.

"The beginning will be a little difficult, but if you are a good wife, everything will be fine for you. He's a mature man! He'll know how to treat you like a princess. He's a good catch. A very good catch", her mother reassured her.



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“I don't like him, mom. I could never love him.”

“Don't talk about things that are beyond your understanding, my daughter. You don't need to love him. Besides, it's not up to you to love him. In a marriage, love is the responsibility of the man and being respectful, the responsibility of the woman. Be submissive to your husband, let him love you and everything will be fine. In a couple, if a woman loves as much as her husband, it will certainly create an imbalance that could only make her suffer more...”.

At these words, Rita felt drained of what little energy she had left. She was helpless, wondering if she still needed to fight and, if so, how to go about it. Her mother wiped away her tears as she told her a ton of things to help her calm down and cooperate. She made it clear to her that given the importance of Tonton Yves' investment in her person, it was impossible for her to say no to him.

“You know very well that your father never wanted to spend anything on your studies. Besides, he doesn't want to spend anything on your sisters, either. He always thought that a girl has nothing to do in a classroom and that is not likely to change. You were able to reach this level of studies thanks to Uncle Yves. Don't be ungrateful. The best way to say thank you is to accept being his wife. With him, you won't lack anything. He will know how to take good care of you, as he has always done”.

Rita, exhausted, took to silence. Her mother helped her get ready and drove her to the living room under her aunts' cheers, who made her sit in a corner. The dowry ceremony finally began. Everything was happening before her eyes; her eyes were wide open, but she didn't see or hear anything. Even in her darkest thoughts, she had never imagined being married with such lightness. Her ambitions for a career as an independent woman were soaring, without her being able to do anything to change the situation. Yet, she had come to believe all this possible, so close she had come to it in recent months. She was doing so well! Why had she given in to her mother's blackmail, when her inner self formally forbade her to make this journey? She knew that she would blame herself all her life for ignoring her intuition, which had never played tricks on her.

Everyone in the house had a great time and enjoyed every second, except the bride. Rita had survived multiple disgusting games with her father and had even learned to live with it, but despite this, she wondered how she could manage to accept this union that was imposed on her. To have fought so much against her father to maintain her innocence and to end up under the sheets of his friend! It was really no luck. She glanced in the direction of Uncle Yves. He sat comfortably, looking so happy, not caring in the slightest about what this young girl, who had grown up before his eyes and was about to be made his wife might think or feel. She was more disgusted and had no doubt that she would never be able to let him run his hands over her body...



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