

Creators of Justice Awards 2023

HONORABLE MENTION

Poetry

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The Complex Realm of Intergenerational Queer Ties

by Rhianna Honey

I often dwell on the past. I wonder about the “what-ifs” of history and the decisions made by me and others and how a slight tweak could have had dramatic, cataclysmic changes to how our history as a human race would have panned out.

What if our queer¹ ancestors were as loud and proud as we are in modern-day countries such as Argentina, Canada, and Belgium? What if we could hold our history in our hands and name our ancestors who never did anything too significant except exist as queer people?

Being young, queer, and on the internet, your first thought is to search for belonging and community. Many, including me, go searching for queer people of the past and are devastated to

come up with only stories of tragedies and hardship. These tales are seemingly the only bits of our history we can find, and even that is so demonstrably little.

We go on social media and engross ourselves in “the culture”- we watch short-form content and read Tumblr and Twitter (now X) threads about same-sex couples of the past! Hurrah! Something to smile about and to latch on to, finally. I knew social media held the truth of my past.

Until you discover that the majority of these are lies.

The photograph of a gay couple from the Great War? Taken 8 years ago and a filter was placed atop it. The photograph of two women walking together with the caption “A lesbian couple together on a walk c.1854”? There is no evidence that they were lovers. The painting of a Transgender woman posed with a fan c.1572? That was merely a cisgendered² man dressed to perform in a play when women were banned from the stage. And so on and so forth. It was and is exhausting and utterly disheartening.

I am not here to speculate the reasons people lie about these stories³. There could be many explanations, some harmless; others malicious, but I am here to discuss our desire to know our history as a community.

Our community flocks to one another- in the underbellies of early 20th century France, in clubs in Weimar Germany post-war, and in ballrooms in late 20th century America. And now, online in our own curated, safe spaces. However, we are always vulnerable to invasion. Clubs raided, the rise of fascism, and the fact that we have spaces for liberation just as others have spaces for hatred (online or otherwise).

The queer world is one which is like no other because of the fact that you cannot trace your lineage as a queer person. It is not something you often have in common with your family- unlike your ethnic, your racial, or (in some cases) your religious background. You cannot take a DNA test such as “23 and Me” and discover your incredible queer ancestors and the incredible lives that they lead. Our history has been suppressed and destroyed in almost all parts of history due to fear and hatred (often from the straight/cis world; sometimes from those who felt ashamed and didn’t want to be known by those specific “choices” they made).

No proof. No links. No strings. No intergenerational ties or relationships. Being queer is my identity yet my ancestors are impossible to trace. Linked by human experience as opposed to nucleotides and blood. Evidence of our existence was buried, burned, and censored, leaving the community void of our own history. The internet contriving make-believe stories of queer people from the wars past fought and lives past lived to comfort those searching for belonging and family. I sympathise with their fiction. We imagine our ancestors yet have no proof of them. Whether their identities and feelings were recorded or whether their identities and feelings were secret and they lead a cis and/or heteronormative life– either way, we don’t know their names.

Viewing history through a queer lens only makes our view blurry. Our history has been forcibly obscured as the victors (and, more often than not, the oppressors) are the ones writing the history books that will be preserved and burning their “enemies” accounts which will not.

There is a noticeable gap in many of our minds when we think of our queer history. We remember Ancient Greece and their homoerotic tendencies and the writings of The Poetess Sappho. And then we generally skip over two thousand years and find our next bit of history from the 1800s

and sporadically placed over the past 200 years or so. What happened in between that gap? Our imaginations can only run wild. When I think of that gap, I feel a gap appear in my heart. Millions of stories are lost to the abyss, due to fear and hatred. Though that may be the case with everything- so much is lost. That conversation you had with a stranger on the street is most likely lost and that time your mother said she's proud of you is lost too. But it hurts to know that attempts made to solidify our presence in the history books were lost. There is no doubt in my mind that we existed in the past and that our ancestors tried to provide us with evidence of this. And that is what hurts the most. Consistently throughout history, many have tried to erase us and our stories. Our icons such as Emily Dickinson and Sappho are still rejected as being Lesbians or even Sapphic⁴ by many- scholars and otherwise.

Fragments remain of Sappho's poetry, just as fragments remain of our collective past. We have long existed, but our stories have not. Sappho's life is manipulated- malleable by only the straight people of the world (past and present and perhaps even future). They say she loved only men and even died for one whom she loved. Despite the obvious evidence against this conspiracy, I still hope they are correct. Otherwise, Sappho's existence of rejection of conformity would have been tainted, corrupted, and censored to conform. To have loved women and to have been a woman who attempted to immortalise this passion and to have this attempt erased would be a tragedy.

And as I sit and write this essay with my pride flag beside me I cannot help but feel a depressing sense of progress. I hope, with all my might, that generations down the line the flag is still being used. And if it is not, I pray it is framed in a museum dedicated to love.

I ache to think of love letters lost. Love musings ripped from their spines and burned on the pyre. I think of that Carbon Dioxide that may still be on this Earth, floating, and of that water vapour released that may have condensed into the water that sits next to me in a glass. The mere possibility that I may be drinking lost love itself. I may not be able to prove it but I feel my ancestors around me constantly, their love wrapping me in a blanket- not trying to cover me and hide me but trying to keep me warm and comforted. Their spirits smooth my hair as I sleep, begging that my story might just survive and whispering affirmations into my ears to enter my subconscious and indirectly inform how I behave. I want to make an impact and I want people to know my identity because it would be a disservice to those lost in the tidal wave of history to not. Constantly, I remind myself to be proud and to love openly because I have that privilege. That privilege that so many haven't had afforded to them. My voice in this matter can only heal wounds, I don't believe it can worsen them. I implore you to think the same. Your story matters, your life matters, your identity matters- if not for yourself then for those who will come after us and look back and let their shoulders fall and rest easy and let out a sigh of belonging.

Our history in the making is already under attack in many countries in the world but specifically in the United States as books are being banned and young queer people are being stripped of their ability to know that they are not the only person in the world feeling these feelings and that many have in the past. That the generation above them and above them and above them and above them are queer and existing. That same-sex parents exist, that trans people exist, and so much more. We cannot let this happen for our present, near future, and future queers. Because when they stop letting children know we exist, they begin to attempt to erase us from the present-

to ban same-sex adoption and marriage, and to ban being trans by way of many “inconspicuous” legislation.

So I urge you, if you are queer, to be open about your sexuality and/or gender. And if it is not safe for you to do so, I beg you to write journals and make videos and post blogs and make art. Never be ashamed because that ashamedness is what has led to so much of our history being erased. Furthermore, that erasure of our history leads to more modern-day ashamedness as many question their validity and the validity of others just like us. I would like to share with you a quote from Harvey Milk: “You must come out. Come out to your parents... I know that it is hard and will hurt them but think about how they will hurt you in the voting booth!”⁵. And I add, think about how they will affect our future history as a consequence of this voting.

I am so full of gratitude that we have got to a place, in an increasing amount of countries in the world, where we can be almost certain that our history will not be erased again. Of course, there will always be ashamed families destroying their queer child’s diary to ensure they don’t “tarnish” or “disrespect” the family name- a circumstance ever present throughout time. But I stand with my head held high as I see our presence on Earth ever growing as more and more feel confident and safe enough to come out. I sleep easy knowing that our online footprints are so vast they will never be able to cover them all and that they will never ever erase us as a people. We are one of the strongest people to have ever existed and we will never cease to exist until all of humanity ceases to exist.

Another solution to ensure future queer people feel natural and present in history is to educate. We cannot see straight and/or cisgender people as the enemy anymore, just as many of them are

conditioned to see us. We must educate in schools and build bridges between generations, genders, and sexualities. We must be an allied, united front.

No, I do not believe we will ever be accepted by all on earth but that is true of any community and even optimists would not have such a pipe dream.

Please, be compassionate of those around you (young and old) who are learning for the first time about our community. Many are naive and ignorant and we cannot yell at them for the blindfold they have had tied around their eyes. We must help them, in a caring and patient way, to remove it and see the world in all its liberated glory and as the utopia we yearn for it to become. I know this is frustrating for so many who have been victimised by the ignorant but we must practice forgiveness at almost all turns in life. And if you don't believe somebody has earned forgiveness from you yet, help them become a person who deserves your forgiveness. Even if that's just a link to a video or a book or an essay such as this. Be patient always. Practise patience always and be patient as you learn how to master your patience. Do not yell as nobody will ever listen to somebody yelling at them as humans are conditioned to defend themselves when attacked. Be empathetic, always.

Don't let our stories fade. Our stories of success and triumph as well as our stories of tragedy and immense loss. Both of these experiences are human experiences- stories that exist in time and space simultaneously despite juxtaposition and they also exist as a dichotomy within us all, as individuals.

I hope my future self will be able to read this essay.

I hope my future family will be able to read this essay. (The human experience type mainly, but my blood family too I suppose).

I leave you with these words:

Knowledge is Power.

Footnotes:

1. When I use the term “Queer” I am referring to the whole of the LGBTQ+ community. Historically, it was used as a slur against gay people predominantly- but it is now mainly used as a label/identity. I deem the word to be reclaimed, in a way that I don’t think has been seen before- it is quite remarkable.
2. Cisgender definition: “denoting or relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth”. Simply, Cisgender: sex=gender; Transgender: sex≠gender.
3. If you are interested, however, Rowan Ellis did a YouTube video talking about this topic more in-depth: <https://youtu.be/H5pMa-WIdW8?si=gS5v2ZB7oOO8mQ2p>
4. Sapphic definition: "a woman who is sexually or romantically attracted to other women" (this does not have to be exclusive- for example: Bisexual women are Sapphic, as are Lesbians).

a boy and a girl

by Sophie Razick

“I’m Palestinian,” she says,

a quiet pride glittering

in her obsidian eyes,

like waning moons

in effervescent skies.

“I’m Palestinian,” he says,

eyes of onyx and embers

darting furiously left and

right,

searching, searching,

searching

for that all-too-familiar

shock

and distrust to mar their

features.

“Oh, um—where’s your family? Are they okay?”

“No yeah they left back in the 40s they’re fine thanks for asking.”

“Oh, um—where’s your
family? Are they—”

“No. They—left.”

I have written this reflection over three times. I have tried and tried and tried to put into words what this poem means to me and I just—can’t. I have written about my feelings. About my Palestinian father. About his shift from Abdul Rahman to Albert. About history and about my life, and yet I cannot even begin to encapsulate what these lines mean.

But I will try again. I am the girl here; the one who has the privilege to tell people that she is Palestinian without having to face life-threatening repercussions for it. The one whose family from Palestine is, for the most part, alive and well. The lucky one. Because even though she does have to hide who she is from some people, at least she has that ability to hide. At least she has that choice.

The boy cannot say the same. Yes, he is from my imagination, but statistically speaking, he has to exist, and that is horrifying. We come from the same place, and yet he was put in this situation and I was put in mine. With him living this and me reading about it in my little New York Times emails.

Perhaps my muse was not the boy, but rather a girl I had read about. And perhaps I should not have structured the poem how I did—should not have compared us the way I did. Because my

vision may have blurred when I read about them taking down photos this 15 year-old-girl—a *girl my age*—had put up of her dead brother whose body could not be found but that does not compare to the everpresent ocean that must be drowning her eyes.

Because *can you even imagine it?* Your blood and bones. Dead and gone and dust beneath your feet. Taken from you like a dream plucked from your head as soon as you wake up. A dream you try to remember but cannot because everyone around you is telling you that it wasn't actually real even though it was real to you. As if that isn't enough. As if you weren't too young to experience this grief, this violation of humanity, this death. As if it isn't wrong to expect you to move on when you are already a ghost, dead and angry and fated to wander the same place until the end of time. As if you can imagine it.

And this might sound like blame, but it is not. Because when you're drowning in the ocean, there are no sides, there are no differences; there is nothing but the water around you and the fear that some unknown creature will surface and open its mouth.

A Mother's First Letter

by Olivia Koo

Now, on this particular morning, the anticipation hung in the air like a delicate fragrance, and her trembling hands cradled a blank piece of paper and a pen.

I stood beside her, offering quiet encouragement. "You can do this, Ms. Lee. Just write from your heart."

The soft rays of the morning sun spilled into Ms. Lee's cozy kitchen, casting a warm, golden glow over the small wooden table where she sat. In the serene village of Haneul Maeul, nestled among the vast mountains of South Korea, where life flowed gently like a tranquil river, I found my days of retirement passing by.

Haneul Maeul was more than just a place; it was a sanctuary where time moved at its own unhurried pace. In the shadow of the mountains, where sunflowers swayed in harmony with the seasons, I discovered both the beauty of life and the untold stories that had shaped the village's resilient elders.

In the aftermath of the Korean War, rural South Korea faced an era marked by adversity. Families grappling with the aftermath of conflict often found education to be a distant dream. Poverty was the silent oppressor, making school tuition and related expenses an insurmountable barrier. Many children were compelled to abandon their academic pursuits to support their families in the wake of economic hardship. As a cruel consequence, countless elders, like those in Haneul Maeul, carried the weight of illiteracy with them to their final days, their unwritten stories and untapped wisdom disappearing with them.

A dedicated teacher in my previous life, I knew that it was not too late to make a difference, to offer these wonderful individuals a chance to learn and discover the joys of reading and writing, and most importantly, to write their first letters to their family that they have longed for all their life. And so, within the cozy corner of my cottage, I transformed a space into a classroom of possibility.

Among the elderly residents of Haneul Maeul was Ms. Lee, a venerable woman whose eyes seemed to mirror the boundless longing within her heart, one that possessed an unwavering maternal love that transcended the physical boundaries that separated her from her beloved children. The distance that now separated her from them was vast, as her eldest son had risen to prominence as a thriving businessman in the bustling heart of Seoul. Her daughter, a dedicated medical professional, had chosen to carve her career path in the chaotic rhythm of a city teeming with life. And her youngest, a prodigious musician, had found a place amongst the harmonious melodies of an international orchestra.

While their accomplishments brought her immense pride, they also left her with a palpable ache—a yearning to bridge the geographical chasm that separated them with the warmth of their written words, hoping to feel their presence in the pages of each letter.

As Ms. Lee began to write, her hand moved slowly at first, hesitating over each character, but soon it found its rhythm.

My... Dearest... Dauter, she wrote, her penmanship a testament to her love and devotion.

I...hope... this... letter... fines... you... well... my... darlin... The... days... here... in... Haneul...

Maeul... are... as... gentl... as... the... breeze... that... rustles... the... sunflwers... in... our... filds.

A small smile tugged at the corners of her lips as she continued to pour her feelings onto the paper. It was as if the floodgates had opened, and her heart's deepest yearnings flowed freely through her pen.

I... miss you... more than words... can... express... Each passing day... feels like an... eternity... without your laughter... and warmth... filling our home.

I watched as Ms. Lee's eyes glistened with tears, but she pressed on, her love serving as both her muse and her strength. She shared stories of the village, its idyllic beauty, and the small moments that brought her joy. She recounted tales of Haneul Maeul, the rolling hills, and the camaraderie of the villagers.

As the letter neared its end, Ms. Lee's hand moved with a newfound confidence. *Know that I am here, thinking of you... every day*, she wrote, her words, a bridge across the miles that separated her from her daughter. *My heart yearns for the day... when we can be together again... sharing our lives, our dreams, and... our love.*

With a flourish, she signed her name at the bottom, *Lee... Soon... Bok*, the ink still wet from her emotions. It was a letter that transcended distance.

Ms. Lee looked up at me, her eyes filled with a mixture of relief and hope. "I did it," she whispered, her voice barely audible. "I wrote a letter to my daughter."

I smiled warmly, touched by her determination. "And it's a beautiful letter, Ms. Lee. Your daughter will treasure it."

As we carefully folded the letter and sealed it in an envelope, Ms. Lee's heart felt a little lighter. She had taken a small but monumental step in that humble kitchen, amidst the golden

rays of dawn, a story of love, courage, and the indomitable human spirit had been written—a story worthy of being shared with the world.

And as I watched Ms. Lee's letter disappear into the world beyond Haneul Maeul, I couldn't help but feel that this was not just a letter; it was a masterpiece of the heart, deserving of recognition and acclaim, a testament to the enduring power of love and the magic of words.

Bullies

by Patience Crawford

Make you trip and tumble fall
'til you think you've lost your all
But that is not really what they think
If they can put you down
They can make your face a frown
And theirs will turn into a smile
And you can never tell if they will ever get good again
They could have been your friend
But their goodness has met its end
Make you cry
Make you sad
That's what they want to do
And try to make you mad
I've gone through it too
Running away is what I do
But it's not the right thing, I know it's true
They want to try to drop you down
So they can put themselves up
But worst of all, they'll make you be
Very sad
So just stand in the face of fear
Be brave
If you stay very true
They can't bully you

Center of coercion: "If you want to live, get married."

by Anastasia Kravchenko

In Kazakh society there is an ineradicable tradition that has existed since time immemorial – bride theft. In ancient times, girls were kidnapped if the bride's family did not agree to the wedding. The groom together with the bride ran away from home under the cover of night and lived their future life with each other. This tradition became more and more perverted and nowadays you can meet girls that were stolen by force. Some girls escape safely, while others stay with the kidnapers, because otherwise it would be considered a disgrace. This problem is growing more and more – few girls are ready to take the case to court.

It was an ordinary evening – birds sat in the trees, mesmerized by their singing, clouds lazily strolled across the sky, and people hurried about their business. Bright lanterns and signs were lit up in the stores, encouraging visitors to look inside.

I walked along the street after work. I was terribly hungry. I have noticed myself eating more and more lately. I am more than sure that stress is affecting me in this way. A few days ago, they announced that they would be looking for a new department head. As a lifelong dreamer of climbing up the career ladder, I could not just ignore it.

Suddenly, a black car with tinted windows pulled up beside me. Two men got out of the car. Some kind of incomprehensible panic squeezed my throat. Something told me that staying where I was, was not a good idea. I turned on my heels and walked briskly away from the place.

I flinched when I felt the man's heavy hand on my wrist. My eyes went wide, my breathing hitched. I tried to shake the man's hand off, yanking my arm with force. I failed...

The second man ran his eyes over my face and nodded toward the car. I started screaming and wriggling, hoping that one of the men would dare to help me. My body was completely filled with paralyzing fear. I began to beat hysterically, hoping for these men to let me go. One of them roughly pulled me into the car and sat next to me, cutting off the possibility of me getting out of this, the beginning of my personal nightmare. In the front sat another man involved in my kidnapping.

We moved from the spot. Behind us were two more cars with several other men sitting in them. It was then that I realized that this was the end. The end of everything – my happiness, my career and my future. And most importantly, the end of my freedom. Everything I had built for so long just started to disappear in an instant. Shattered by the harsh reality. My plans and aspirations... Everything, absolutely everything, was disappearing with every minute I sat in the car.

Heavy clouds began to gather in the sky, blocking out the evening sun. All the birds that had been sitting in the trees scattered in fright, depriving people of the opportunity to listen to their melodious singing. People picked up their steps and hid in the huge houses, stores and cafes.

I struggled to pick up my phone and text my mother to rescue me from this horror. Calmed me down. Called the police. Anything at all! I dialed my mother's number, waiting for the long beeps to be replaced by her voice.

I failed. One of the kidnappers took the phone and threw it so that the phone rolled under the driver's seat. I lost my last chance to tell anyone my location.

The first raindrops began to fall, crashing to the ground. Some of them tapped quietly against the glass. A barely audible thunderstorm rumbled outside, heralding a heavy downpour.

I squeezed myself into the chair, hugging myself tightly around my shoulders. Tears began to slowly fall from my eyes. They rolled down my cheek, and then some of them fell briskly onto the seat, others stayed on my lips. I bit my salty lips until they bled—the taste of iron filled my mouth.

Gradually, the intensity of the rain became more and more intense. The rain began to drum heavily on the ground and on the roofs of the buildings. Lightning was increasingly tearing the sky with its flashes. The elements raged, and so did the thoughts in my head....

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I heard that man trying to reach me.

– Can you hear me?! Getting married is not akin to dying. – He said, shaking me by the shoulder and urging me to pay attention to him.

I did not care at all. Absolutely. No human in the world would ever wish to be married to a human he did not love. No one would be willing to give all of themselves to finally dissolve into a marriage and another person. No one would be willing to say goodbye to their desires in order to fulfill someone else's whim....

Upon arrival, we were greeted by many people. Absolutely no one cared about the raging rain, which was capable of soaking clothes to the last thread in a second. The screams from all sides were deafening. I wanted to crawl into a corner and stay there for hours. Some woman was throwing a shashu* than wished for a sweet life. But to whom? Certainly not me...

After the stress I had been through, my head was fuzzy, and I was floating. I was swaying from side to side. I felt nauseous. Another woman was saying something cheerfully as she walked be-

side me. The cheerful cries of the children bouncing along beside me made me sick. How could I be happy about all this?

I was led into the house. Lightning raged outside with renewed vigor, cutting the sky with bright flashes. The loud sound of lightning seeped into the house, making me flinch every time. Something snapped in me at that moment. I began to squirm from side to side with renewed vigor, shouting curses at these people. They didn't seem to care – they continued shouting and making noise with joy.

A few passages later, I found myself in a room. I was surrounded only by girls. Some of them were very young, others were of advanced age. My eyes, red from crying, hurt, I wanted to sleep so badly....

My breathing quickened and I trembled. My hands began to shake so treacherously that I was unable to lift them. My legs could not take it anymore, and I fell to my knees. My blank stare stared at the floor. By the edge of my ear, I heard someone picking up something from the shelf. My eyes widened with horror. I started to crawl backward, but I hit the wall. There was no way out...

I started screaming and twitching again. I cursed them for everything. For being a part of this. For allowing themselves to do this. For now, wanting to take everything away from me!

Some older women sat down next to me and tried to calm me down. Their desire to calm me down made me even angrier. It seemed as if all my fear was gone at that moment. I jumped up, getting to my feet. I tried to fix my eyes on something, trying to find something that would help

me escape and protect myself from these people. But I could not find anything. The room was practically empty, except for the seemingly heavy side tables.

– My dear, be careful, you'll hurt yourself! – One of the grandmothers exclaimed.

Someone tried to sit me down, but I did not give in and pulled my arms out with all my might.

Immediately afterward, several women grabbed me and sat me down by force back on the floor.

A panic attack came over me. My pupils were dilated and I stared at them like a madwoman. The oldest woman tried to calm me down, holding a white handkerchief in her hand.

Gradually my cries for help and trembling turned into pleas. I begged them to stop doing this. I begged them to let me go and let me leave. Am I just an object that cannot have freedom and a life of my own?

«I want to live so badly, Mom, I want to live so badly... Why do people think a woman is just some object? Why do they let it happen? Why do so many people turn a blind eye to it? Mom... Was it all for nothing? Was I born just to be someone's wife with no freedom, no choice? I so want to live... I so want to do only what I only want to do myself... Are my dreams just an empty sound? Do strangers have the right to decide what I want to do with my body and mind? Is that... Is that right? My only dream right now is to be in your warm arms again, Mom... Away from all this.»

My nerves gave way. I felt like I was going to faint just a little bit more. In the time it took me to sit completely exhausted, the woman threw a handkerchief over me. I jerked, forcefully pushing her hands away from me and practically tearing the white handkerchief. A realization came over me that squeezed my throat.

I squirmed, letting the tears run from my eyes with renewed vigor. My eyelids slowly closed and there I was, fainting and slumping to the floor. Somewhere in the periphery of my consciousness, before I blacked out, I heard the sound of sirens....

Literally seconds later, I woke up on the floor. Everything around me was hazy, my vision failing me. How much time had passed? I don't know. Some people were running around me worriedly, shouting something to each other. Memories slowly started to come back to me. Bright lightning flashed across the sky, intensifying the already throbbing pain in my head. Each flash of lightning seemed to remind me more and more of who I was and where I was.

– Aisha, honey, are you okay? – Asked the woman who was putting the shawl on me.

No. I'm not okay. My last hope was shattered by the harsh reality. The hope that the police would get me out of here. How I wanted to scream in pain and bitter disappointment....

– Let me go, please... – My quiet whisper traveled through the room.

I sobbed, feeling the light hand of a girl my age on my shoulder. She looked at me sympathetically and helped me up. The girl said something quietly to the other women in the room and led me out of there.

There was a man standing at the exit of the room, vaguely reminding me of someone. I staggered to the side, losing my balance. The girl gripped my arm tightly, keeping me from falling.

– Hello, Aisha. My name is Nurali, and I'm your fiancé.

Nurali... Something clicked in my mind, and I stared at him fearfully. I remembered who he was and how we knew each other.

At my brother's wedding, which was a month ago, many of our relatives had gathered, as well as people I didn't know. Everyone exchanged warm greetings regardless of who was related to whom. I greeted people too, pretending to know them all and everything, including numerous uncles and aunts. A quadruple aunt? Oh yes, I remember you of course, we only met at one event!..

When it was time for the dance, I was asked to dance by a young man who had kept his eyes on me that evening. I said yes, because I did not want to spend the whole evening at my brother's wedding.

The slow dance seemed to last forever. I began to doubt the rightness of my choice – the guy was acting very strangely, but I wrote it off to the fact that he must be worried. And then, when it seemed like the dance was coming to an end, he pinned me down and whispered one phrase: «You will marry me. » Then I thought it was just a joke and laughed softly, awkwardly releasing myself from his embrace. Only now I realized that it was not a joke at all, and he was not going to let me go....

– Let me go. My parents will not let that happen.

– This wedding was negotiated between your parents and mine. – He shifted his gaze from me to the window. – I do not think they are going to change their minds.

I jerked and the girl let go of me. At that moment, I realized the hopelessness of my situation. My parents. They just agreed to this atrocity... If I don't agree to this marriage, then...

I pressed myself against the wall and slowly rolled down it. There was not a single thought left in my head. The realization of everything that had happened to me was giving me a headache.

I must either go against the will of my parents and cut all ties, condemning myself to a long and hard life, or agree to marry a man I never knew in my life....

After a few seconds, I realized that the only thing I can do in this situation is to agree to the marriage. I have no other right. I just cannot stand it if I cut all ties with my parents, who have always been supportive and helpful, even though they put me through this choice. Maybe they want what's best for me? Maybe this is not a nightmare after all and I'll be happy with him? Or... Is it really a nightmare and I will stay in it forever...?

*Shashu is the tradition of showering people with candy and coins during joyous moments.

Guests are sure to collect the scattered sweets – there is a deep meaning in it. If you pick up a shashu, it means that there will be such joy in your house. Often shashu is thrown when a guy brings home a bride.