

Suffer the Children **By Carol Greene**

“Just move on to the back of the line,” snarled the man with the tattoos and shaved head. Amena and Hasan stood with their mother, Maya, whose English wasn’t yet good enough to make out what he said, but she knew it wasn’t kind. It was humiliating to be lined up at the same downtown Calgary foodbank again. And now it was frightening. The three of them looked at him anxiously. “Go on. I said back of the line!” he shouted.

Amena, 10-years old, in her headscarf and yellow crocs – softly replied. “We’re just waiting our turn like everyone else.” She gripped her mother and brother’s hands more tightly. And all three jumped back when the fellow food-banker lurched at them, arms wide, as if coming for them.

“Hey! Enough of that Eddie,” chimed someone further down the line. “That’ll do. Leave them be.”

“Fuckin’ Muslims,” said Eddie.

People turned away, looking down at their feet – or anywhere else – breathing in the uncomfortable air. Wishing they were anywhere else; wishing there weren’t so many Eddies in the world.

It wasn’t that Amena and her family were unaccustomed to lineups, or hostility for that matter. They’d spent almost three years at a refugee camp in Jordan before being

resettled in Canada. Like the camp, the first few years in Canada were hard. But when their dad, Nizar, eventually got a job driving a truck, they no longer had to depend on social services and charities to get by, and life improved.

Eventually, her parents put a down payment on a three-bedroom house in east Calgary. It had a driveway and backyard. A backyard! In addition, she and her brother Hasan were treated to new clothes at the beginning of each school year, and, on special occasions, they even went to the Ishtar Restaurant, where their dad always winked and assured their mother, “the pastries are in no way as good as yours, habibi.”

“Liar,’ she’d giggle, patting his wrist. “My handsome, wonderful liar.”

But all this changed when Nizar went to prison.

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Frank loved working for Cindy. First, she didn’t mind paying him under the table. She said it kept her costs down, too. Second, she had enough properties and renovations going to keep him in work year-round. So, he had a steady, dependable income – all tax free! Third, Cindy was gorgeous. Great bod and boobs. Long straight platinum hair. Huge brown eyes. Even in her mid-fifties, she was totally hot. And she was nice to him, too. Frank couldn’t take his eyes off her.

Since Cindy's husband died of leukemia a few years back, she had carried on their business, investing in and flipping properties. They'd done very well in real estate, and now she could split her time between her animal rights work and the reno business.

Cindy was a big animal lover and avowed vegan – she talked about being a vegan all the time. In fact, Frank had never seen her eat anything – leafy or legged. She was always long, lean and blonde, just like he liked his women.

Cindy knew Frank was always checking her out. She didn't mind. As a former model, she was accustomed to being ogled. She felt a certain pride in still turning heads the way she did and knew there was power in beauty. At least in some situations. With Frank, anyway, it was an asset. There he was every morning, early, ready for work. And he had some solid skills, too.

Although a bit on the rough side, Frank was a well-built, roguishly handsome guy – about 10 years her junior. He fancied himself a ladies' man and boasted that he had no shortage of women. He'd been married twice, he told her, but neither marriage worked out, especially after the kids came along. "Evidently, I don't have much of a paternal instinct," he smirked. "Five kids in total, that I know about, anyway, hehehe."

He said he had three of them with his two exes, and another two with different girlfriends. "I didn't ask for 'em, didn't want 'em. When the kids arrived, the relationships always went bust," he said. "All four women have harassed me for support ever since."

“But” he said, pointing to the side of his tanned brow, “I’m too smart for them. Use fake ID when I rent places and only work for cash. No paper trail.”



Cindy’s dad was an Anglican minister, but she’d lost her enthusiasm for the church a long time ago. Her preferred place of worship was The Harmony Meat Packers on highway 16. It was there she’d been holding a vigil every Sunday from 10 a.m. to noon for the past five years. Her spirit soared there. More so than it ever had at an Anglican service. She was particularly fervent about fighting the ‘ag-gag’ law, Bill 27, imposed in 2019 to stop people like her from protecting animals.

The fines were high, too – starting at \$25,000 and six months in jail. Ostensibly, the bill was intended to protect animals and the food chain from the risks created when trespassers entered places where farm animals were kept. But she knew it was to keep activists like her out of the way, so they couldn’t investigate and report on the abhorrent conditions they kept these poor creatures in.

Instead of intimidating her, the bill only strengthened her resolve. The number of protesters at Harmony kept increasing – slowly, but steadily -- from two or three initially, to about 15 people, on average, with their water jugs, handpumps and signs - “Animals have rights, too!” “Repeal Bill 27!”

Sometimes they were joined by celebrities, which helped draw media attention and increase their numbers. Having celebrities around always added extra excitement and if they used their social media ‘megaphones’ to support the fight, they raised so much more interest in her cause.

Basically, the protesters would assemble in front of the gates of the Harmony abattoir and await the arrival of the trucks delivering the pigs to slaughter. The Harmony owners and weekly protesters had an unwritten truce that the trucks would stop their motors and give them two minutes to comfort and water the pigs. Then the protesters would give the “okay” and step away from the truck and gate, allowing the truck to proceed. The driver would fire their truck back up, check the mirrors, give their horn a toot for the ‘all clear,’ and enter the gate.

This had been the routine for five years, and Cindy was pretty fed up with it. She felt they weren’t getting anywhere – weren’t making enough of an impact. She wanted to up the stakes. Make it much more difficult for the farmers and food processing industry to do what they do. She didn’t want to give a symbolic goodbye and spritz of water to these poor pigs. She wanted to save them. To free them.

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Nizar had just returned from a long-haul cross-country job and was so happy to see Maya and the kids. He had two shorter local runs to make the next day, Sunday, and

then he'd have Monday off to get caught up around the house. The grass needed cutting and their new patio furniture set sat waiting in its packaging to be assembled.

It was so nice to have a yard, he often mused, where they could welcome friends for barbecues and where the kids could run and play without fear. Nizar expressed these gratuities in his daily prayers. They had all survived so much together. The camp, in particular, had been so hard on them, especially the children.

But he had succeeded in getting his family to safety in Canada. A country he now loved as much as he once did Syria.

On Sunday morning, he kissed the heads of Hasan and Amena, both still in their pajamas, and told them to be sure to finish their homework and help their mother around the house. "Maya, my love, I'll be back by 4 p.m. to help prepare the kebobs for tonight's dinner," he called, heading out the door.

Nizar dreaded these Sunday morning runs. Absolutely dreaded them: The protesters screaming at him unsettled him, reminding him of the protests he was part of on the streets of Aleppo. The ones that always turned deadly when the security forces opened fire. Such chaos. So many maimed and killed.

The usual gang of about a dozen animal rights activists greeted Nizar at the Harmony slaughterhouse. All the usuals, and of course their 'leader in protest,' the pretty older woman with the watering jug and loudspeaker. He didn't know why she needed a

blowhorn, given it was just him, the pigs and the handful of protesters. If anything, the enhanced volume just frightened the already anxious animals more.

Like the other drivers who worked this route, he'd been told by the processing plant managers to remain calm and polite. To not engage in any discussions or disputes with the protesters. To wait two minutes while they comforted and watered the pigs. Then start the truck, make sure all is clear, toot the horn and enter the plant. "No need to get bent out of shape. Just do your job. Easy peasy," they said.

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Cindy was agitated that day. She'd hardly had time to water a half dozen of them, and the truck was already firing back up. She was tired of this Sunday morning routine that simply wasn't going far enough. What they were doing hardly inconvenienced Harmony. No, today all bets were off. She was going to stop the truck all day if she had to. Make sure this group of pigs got a decent send off. Lots of love, water and disruption, was her thinking. She moved to the front of the vehicle, put down her jug and placed both hands on her slim hips.

Starting the truck back up always made Nizar nervous. He checked and rechecked his mirrors, ensuring the protesters had moved away from the pigs. He turned the key. The engine groaned. He politely tooted the horn -- several times -- and heard the loud pop of the compression brakes releasing.

It was at this point, the protesters always crowded beside the cab and hurled abuses at him. As a Muslim, he didn't even eat pork! He had no quarrel with them, really. He was just doing his job. A job he needed and valued. He gently moved the truck into gear, thinking "I wish people cared as much about the millions of children in refugee camps as they do these fattened swine." Slowly, he rolled the truck forward.

A crunch. Shrieks, screams from the protesters. "What, what?" he demanded.

"You've killed her! Back the truck up. Back up the fucking truck!"

He leaned on his horn, sounding it full blast, and put the truck into reverse – slowly rolling just a couple feet. Engaged the brakes and although he'd been trained never to exit the cab, he jumped down. "No, no!" he cried. There in front of his left front wheel was the woman with the long platinum hair – it was matted against her bleeding, crushed skull. He hadn't seen her over the hood of the truck. Hadn't seen her at all; thought the path was clear. He'd done everything he was supposed to. He hadn't seen her standing in front of the truck. He dropped to his knees. "Ya muhamad ya 'ilahi," he sobbed, "no."

Sirens roared towards them, people shrieked and cried all around him. "Murderer! Murderer!"

The pigs snorted from the back of the trailer. Someone jumped up and unhitched the tailgate and let the pigs exit. Confused and careless, they milled about Highway 16 and around the truck, obstructing the emergency crews and stopping traffic in all directions.

The paramedics shouted at the protesters to “keep the pigs the hell away from the victim!” -- from Cindy. “Get them away, now!” they yelled, pushing the beasts back with the soles of their boots.

The police arrived, too. They moved everyone back, taped off the area, and put Nizar in handcuffs, pushing his head low as they shoved him in the back of a cruiser.

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Cindy was pronounced dead at the scene. After two years of legal proceedings, Nizar was convicted of careless driving and involuntary manslaughter. He was sentenced to five years in prison.

By that time, Cindy had become a cause célèbre. She was the new face and martyr of the global animal rights movement. Vigils were held all over the world for her. Billboards were erected in France and Germany in her honour. YouTube tributes abounded, and one of her celebrity supporters was financing a full-length documentary of her life, due for release the next year.



Laura was hot, tired and in line at the Good Sheppard food bank again with her two little guys, Billy and Frank Jr. *They both looked so much like their dad, she thought. That son of a bitch.*

She'd genuinely thought she loved Frank when she married him. He was handsome, handy and a lot of fun. But what a weasel he turned out to be. Never give her a single dime to help support their boys. Walked out without so much as a word and never once called to ask about their wellbeing. He left her when Frank Jr. was just one year old, and she was preggers with Billy. *How could she have been so stupid to have married that asshole?* She berated herself time and time again.

But she did have her two beautiful boys and she loved them fiercely. She did her absolute best to provide for them. It was tough raising them while working part time at Walmart. But she was determined she would raise them to be better men than their father, Frank.

Ah shit, she moaned. There's that neo-Nazi Eddie in line again, harassing some poor immigrant family. He is such a nasty piece of work. I'm just so tired of his crap. Of all of this.

"Hey! Enough of that, Eddie," Laura yelled up the line. "That'll do. Leave them be."

