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Comparative Analysis: “Light” and “The Volunteer”

One does not think much about the people they love or the place they call home. In order to cultivate better opportunities, people often leave their homes and their lifestyle behind to move to new destinations and new beginnings. These beginnings tend to have a strange effect on people. If these people are among the ones left behind by people seeking new opportunities in new places, they hold on the people they love and care with increased intensity. This is exhibited in the story called “Light” by Lesley Nneka Arimah (Arimah), where the departure of Enebeli’s wife has made his daughter the able of his eyes. Hence, he spoils her rotten. The beginning lines of the story show the love and the care he holds for his daughter in one sentence.

“When Enebeli Okwara sent his girl out in the world, he did not know what the world did to daughters. He did not know how quickly it would wick the dew off her, how she would be returned to him hollowed out, relieved of her better parts.”

Not only do these lines show the father’s love for her daughter, but they also show how scared he is of sending her out in the world. He has been left behind by his wife. However in “The Volunteer” by Lucinda Nelson Dhavan (Brazier) shows the tale of a wife, who has followed her husband into the suburbs of India. While her husband did take her with him in his attempt to be a part of the Millennium India, however, she had nothing better to do than volunteer her time at a children’s shelter. Being exposed to 18 kids, once a week is too much for her, making her question her desire to have some in the first place:

“And her. What does she know about children? She isn’t sure she wants any. She and Shankar are still in the experimental stage, they don’t even know where they want to live.”

This desperation, that things are no longer in their power is exhibited by the wives in both stories. While Dhavan’s Carrie is determined to quit with the following words:

“She thinks, as she passes out the last compliments, that she will call the Director the minute she gets home and tell him she can’t come any more. She’ll say she needs to focus on learning Hindi first.”

Enebeli’s wife is at her wit’s end about how to connect with and disciple her daughter that she is continent’s away from. She has been losing her influence on her for quite some time and the idea of not being able to instill cultural values in her daughter worries her immensely. This is a point of contention between the husband-wife duo as well, as exhibited in:

“Her mother attempts to correct the girl herself, but much is lost in transmission over the wires and a long absence has diluted much of the influence a mother should have. It is one of the things Enebeli and his wife disagree on, this training up of the girl, and it has widened the schism between them.”

However, no matter what decision’s Carrie or Enebeli has made in terms of the shelter’s children or his daughter, they are committed to wanting the best for them, as shown below. Carrie’s tells the boy, the one seeking comfort with Carrie’s arm wrapped around her:

“I’ll bring paints and brushes and we’ll make real pictures!” He stays there, under her arm. His eyes move from the floor to her feet. She can feel his stiff body waiting for something more, more than touch, more than she can give, but she cannot move.”

While Enebeli vows to take care of his daughter and look after her, no matter what he has to do:

“He does not yet wonder where she gets this, this streak of fire. He only knows that it keeps the wolves of the world at bay and he must never let it die out.”

# Works Cited

Arimah, Lesley Nneka. *Light*. Granta, n.d. https://granta.com/light/.

Brazier, Chris. *One World: A Global Anthology of Short Stories*. New Internationalist, 2009.