

## Unexpected

(Two short stories beginning with the same sentence.....)

### THE FIRST STORY

The pregnancy was a surprise. Don't misunderstand me – I know the mechanics of it all. It's just that the women in my village don't get pregnant very often. Malnutrition and the odd bout of dysentery mess with our monthly cycles. It's not unusual for me to miss several months. But eventually I couldn't ignore the thickening of my skinny waist and the morning nausea.

“Daughter,” said my father, “you will have to leave. If the crops are bad again next year, I will barely have enough to feed myself. And that husband of yours needs to move to where the work is. No one around here needs a carpenter!”

In the end we all had to leave. There were rumours of another rebel incursion to the west of us. Men from the wrong tribe were butchered, the rest forcibly enlisted. The women from any tribe were raped, the children enslaved. The government troops who were meant to protect us vanished overnight.

We've been walking now for nine days. The desert days are dry and dusty, the nights stony cold. My back aches and there is a dragging feeling in my belly. The dusk is settling in for another weary night. But despair suddenly turns to hope. In the distance, down in the valley below we can see the tents of the refugee camp. I can hear the generators powering the arc lights that surround the MSF hospital with its large red cross on the roof. Will I make it?.....

Several hours later a nurse peers into a basinet at the end of a hospital bed.

“Hello little miracle, born on Christmas day. No gold, frankincense or myrrh for you! But while you are here, we have the gifts of clean water, food and medicine. After that, may God be with you.”

### THE SECOND STORY

(somewhere in the Middle East, two old women, Ada and Ruth, are gossiping)

Ada: The pregnancy was a surprise.



Ruth: Wasn't it just! Didn't I always say you had to watch out for the quiet ones, Ada?

Ada: I blame her mother. Should have told the girl about the facts of life instead of filling her head with talk about how she was born to fulfil a holy destiny.

Ruth: At least they got the wedding done quickly, fast enough to make it almost respectable anyway!

Ada: Do you know, Ruth, I'm surprised that she hasn't had it already. I was expecting it to arrive, you know, 'early', 'premature', know what I mean.....mind you, I have heard it said that it's not even his.

Ruth: But who else's could it be? And why bother with that story about an angel. It's not like she's the first girl to get caught out. And the match is respectable enough for both families.

Ada: If you ask me Ruth, there's money at the root of it. I bet the girl came with a massive dowry to make sure he stepped up, whoever the father turns out to be.

Ruth: Well, it's done now. Last month's news. What about this star? The priests at the temple say that it foretells the coming of a great prophet.

Ada: Pah! Priests! What do they know! They wouldn't know a prophet if one jumped up and bit them on the ars....

Ruth: ADA!