

Nayera Nagaty

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They came to take her two days after everything had happened. Four bearded men in stained white thawbs broke down the door; two of them entered the house while the others went to search the back. They found a pile of condensed dirt next to a T.V covered with dust, a broken crib and a rusty red wagon filled with children's books.

She was found in her room, kneeling with her forehead down on the floor, praying. The two men kicked her over, grabbed a fist full of hair that forced her hijab to fall back, revealing her dark chocolate hair with premature white hairs spread out amongst the rest.

They dragged her outside to an old pick up truck, a white 89 extended Toyota cab with faded red blotches everywhere. They often drove through town in it, rounding up people like cattle. As they covered her head with a black sack, she started to pray before she felt one of them slap her. "Stupid woman. He will not save you now." She did not shed a tear she; suffered in silence.

She couldn't tell where they were taking her; all she knew was that it was somewhere far. She could feel the transition from the smooth feeling of the concrete to an uneven, bumpy dirt road. The back of the truck smelled of smoke, stale sweat and rusty metal. She could feel a film of dirt on her callused hands, and the air didn't smell clean anymore. She could hear the tires burying the gravel deeper inside the dirt, the breaking of small branches, and the occasional splash of a mud puddle.

She began to reminisce about the times she spent with her father back home. She had lived in a small village; her house was a small hut built with mud and cement blocks. There was small window in the living room; she would place her prayer rug beside her father's five times a day. There wasn't much to do in her village but pray and play games.

Her home was surrounded by a mixture of rough pavement, dirt roads and broken down cars. Her favorite game to play was the trust game; her and her father would take turns blindfolding each other, while the other one lead the way. The game always began with "Do you trust me?"

She could almost hear her endless giggles and feel the cotton of her father's thawb as she clasped it tightly in attempt to maneuver outside. They had played the game so often; she learned how to feel her surroundings; knowing the difference between road and dirt, between rocks and pebbles, between mud and water.

Her thought was interrupted by one of the men: "Haga, would you like some water? Maybe a piece of bread?" He voice sounded young, kind and warm. He must have been a fresh recruit because the others would've died before asking about her needs. They brainwashed innocent boys and turned them into bearded monsters. The thought of it made the deepest pits of her stomach turn.

She thought about monsters, about the stories she had been told as a child. They typically hid under beds, lurked around darkness and liked to eat misbehaved children in the middle of the night. The older she got, the more she realized that monsters weren't confined to stories because she had married one.

A few years ago, her family had lost everything to the bearded men. They claimed the village hadn't shown enough respect for Allah and became too "lenient." As

punishment, they raided houses taking anything of value; they bombed other villages, set fire to the schools, and closed down cinemas.

Her father's store had been snatched up by one of the fires and he could no longer afford her. He feared the bearded men would take her away, so instead he arranged for her to marry someone they knew. She was given to Sayid, a wealthy toy storeowner who had supplied her father's game shop. She did not shed a tear she; suffered in silence.

Sayid was in his mid-thirties with uncombed hair the color of milk chocolate. He was rather stocky for his height; he stood at five foot three with eyes darker than the night, with a freshly shaved face. Always carried a red crystal sibha in his pocket with the tassel hanging out. He always smelled of sandalwood incense and vodka

She was sixteen the first time she laid eyes on him; it was on her wedding day. They were under a red chiffon cloth with a mirror placed on their laps; there was nothing to look at but each other. "I'm Sayid, we're going to make each other very happy." She began feeling faint, beads of cold sweat slowly rolling down her face and the knot in her throat seemed to be growing as she dug her nails into her palm. Sayid reminded her of the guys who tried to sell knock off Barbies for full price.

The Imam began officiating the ceremony, "God's sacred bond of marriage covers both of you, and each of you is a reflection of the other. You are bound together for eternity." With those words her life was over.

Later that night, she heard him unzip his pants; the sound of his belt buckle clattering as he tried to remove his pants made her body tremble. She turned to face the cold white wall as she waited for womanhood to be forced upon her. She looked up at the

sky praying for it to be over, and five minutes later it was. She did not shed a tear; she suffered in silence.

The next day she tried to remember her night with her husband. All she could remember was feeling beads of sweat dripping from his forehead onto her face; the sharp pain below her waist as he drunkenly entered her. She could smell the sandalwood oozing from his pores and the taste of wine as his tongue forcefully made its way in her mouth.

Sayid wanted a younger girl, one who would carry all ten of his children and would've been the perfect candidate. After eight months of trying it was apparent she would never give him children, but there was always a miscarriage. She acquired infinite battle wounds as a result of her failures. Her back was mapped in lines of scarred tissue; each told a story of different a mistake. Some of her teeth were missing, result of over salted food or over cooked meat. Her thighs and breasts were black and blue, often times matching her face. She did not shed a tear; she suffered in silence.

During the last two years of their marriage, Sayid had lost his toy store to a bombing lead by the bearded men. His home became a prison; he never left, always drinking and listening to the news. His bare face now fully bearded, his teeth yellowed and hair turning grey. One night after one too many drinks, Sayid couldn't tell up from down. "Run me a bath! That's all you're good for, if that."

She filled his bath with warm water, peppermint oil and some soap; he stumbled in, nearly falling over with the paper and a glass full of wine in hand. "Get out of my sight." Twenty minutes later she went to check on him. She stood over his body watching the water creep its way to his face, with every inch she was closer to being free. She let the water have its way with his life.

She watched his body weakly fight for air, lightly jerking and splashing water all over the floor. After some time everything stopped, only silence remained. She climbed in the tub, with either foot on each side of his body and moved him so he would be facing the edge of the tub.

As she attempted to pull him out, she slipped on a puddle of water and landed on her tailbone with his upper body drooped over her. This was the most pain she had felt in years, more painful than leaving her house, more painful than his abuse and more painful than her wasted life. This pain was a reminder that this is what her life amounted to; this is what she had been reduced to.

She dragged him outside, behind the house. She buried him next to the broken crib, the rusty red wagon and a small grave that housed all of her unborn children. She threw his precious TV right next to him, along side his radio. With that she was free.

The truck had driven over a bump that knocked her head against the roof; she felt a splash of cold mud land on her hands. It was an instant relief from the scorching heat. At their destination, the young man kindly attempted to lead her out of the truck but was interrupted by one of the men.

“YALA!” he yelled. He walked behind her, shoving her with each step. They pushed her down to the ground; she landed knees first on the dirt. They removed the sack from her head and cut the ties around her bloodied wrists. Her eyes opened slowly and there it was, a hole deep enough to fit an entire body. The men of the town gathered around the hole with stones in hand. She did not shed a tear; she suffered in silence.

