

The Silenced

“Only one person knew the truth,”

Zohra thought, as she laid out the glistening white eggs she had collected from her family’s hens in the busy Kabul marketplace.

That morning she was careful to carry the eggs in the frayed wicker basket her Bibi gave her when she was eight and had just started school. That was four years ago, a lot had changed, and Zohra was far from acquiring any form of education. Last week she dropped two of the eggs while on her trek to the market and her brother Ali nagged at her for the potential she had broken while walking. She's always been careful in her footing.

“Heel, Toe, Heel, Toe...”

Yet that day the ground was wet. It had rained the night before, inducing the air to suspend in an earthy essence. Causing the mud underneath her worn down green sandals to slip and cascade, carrying the young girl like a wooden board in a wave.

Before stopping in the heart of the market, where she would sell her prized eggs, she visited Baba’s workplace: the rug store. Zohra placed her foot onto the small step to enter; already, her cheap sandals were greeted with the plush Afghan carpets. The carefully knotted red rugs seemed endless, and their intense colours, when washed by the morning sun, gave the small store a hum of warmth. Baba’s back was facing her while he hung the rugs that they never seemed to be able to afford. Sitting by the counter, the store owner, Agha, greeted her with a bellowing

voice that startled her. With each step she took, puffs of dust from the woven wool seemed to rise reminding her of the sheepish musk they held.

Her father gave Zohra, his beloved daughter, a quick smile in her direction while she gave Agha his eggs. He would buy them from Zohra every morning as means to aid his worker's family. Zohra reached over the counter with the shell encased yolks in hand, but was withheld a little longer by the man sitting across. Her body went as cold as the cool morning mud her toes had experienced on her walk. Agha, feeling her body grow limp produced a smile that sent razor blades down Zohra's back. She quickly ducked her head down looking into her basket, seeing its straws becoming loose through the years of use.

Her body became distant; it was once again not hers. Agha knew Zohra could not tell anybody; she would bring shame; she would cause Baba to lose his job. After months of turmoil she realized that what happened to her would reap no benefits for anyone if told. Seconds passed by, yet time seemed as thick as the mud she had trudged through.

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Zohra squatted down in the marketplace and placed her basket of eggs in front of her, expecting customers to pass by. The fragrant fumes of naan from the nearby bakery began to infiltrate her nose. The sweet smell of the stretched out dough, topped with black sesame seeds caused her stomach to growl, as it did every morning. She looked around and was exposed to the array of merchants selling the fresh produce from the farms on the outskirts of the city. Mountains of pale honeydew, freshly picked plump grapes and red apples so crisp that their aroma escorted a person that walked past them.

She looked over her shoulder and began to take notice of the hysteria on people's faces. They were running towards her direction, passing her; through the fleeting screams she was only capable of grasping words such as, "Leave!" "Run away!" The young girl was quick to jump to her feet, yet her basket was nearly forgotten. What would her brother say if she came home empty-handed? She hastily picked it up as she felt the whizzing bodies run past her; she knew she had to be careful to not falter.

"Heel, Toe...Heel, Toe."

Zohra could only imagine the happiness her family would have when she brought the eggs home intact while everybody else was running. Her thoughts stood still as she sensed the scorching flames lick the streets of the Kabul market before they had even reached her.

At that moment, Zohra felt a mad stillness in the midst of the chaos; for some exceptional reason, she felt peace. Her voice was drowned out with the bomb, her scars were etched in deeper, yet the truth; her reality ceased to exist.