

The Girl who was Forgotten

It's been 8 years, and no one has come for me. 8 years of abuse, verbal and sexual assault, and a dread that has set itself in my heart and will never leave. My last and final wish is to have my story heard; even just by one person. All I can do is leave it here and hope for someone to find it. So here it is: My name is Faiza Hassan, and this is the sorrowful tale of how I was illegally sold into a marriage I never wanted.



It all started when I was living in Toronto with my family. We were immigrants, having moved to America only a few years prior. I was seventeen, in my last year of high school. My family was almost broke since my dad had lost his job, so me and my younger brother had to get jobs to help support the family. I always studied hard and kept out of trouble, hoping to get scholarships so I could go to university and make a better life for my family and I. It wasn't easy being a seventeen year old muslim hijabi immigrant, but I was proud of my culture and religion. I kept my head up and did what I had to do in order to get by. That is, until that all changed, almost in an instant.

The only place where I can think to pinpoint the beginning is the moment I started working a new job at the local superstore. I was forced to quit my old job at McDonalds, due to the fact that my manager and many of my coworkers were either racist, Islamophobic, or both, creating too many issues for me to keep working there. Almost getting my hijab pulled off by my

coworker was enough of a sign that I needed to find a different job. I remember my first day at my new occupation, there was a really sweet old lady whose groceries I had to check out.

“What a beautiful scarf you're wearing,” she said, studying the indigo and white tile-like design printed on my hijab.

Caught off guard, I smiled. “Thank you, ma’am. Would you like to donate a dollar for the Children's Hospital??” I asked, scanning her last item and placing it in the shopping bag. I noticed her silently slip a five dollar bill into the donation box as I placed her bag on the conveyor belt.

Instead of taking the bag and leaving, she looked me up and down. “What is a sweet, young girl like you doing working?” She wondered out loud. I stared at her, dumbfounded. No stranger had ever called me any of those things. As I opened my mouth to answer, she continued. “Surely you should have a handsome man take care of you.”

I simply shook my head. “I am more than careful of taking care of myself, thank you,” I assured her. “Have a good day, ma’am.” And with that, she smiled at me one last time and left. The rest of my day went as it usually did, as did the rest of the week. I didn’t think much of what that lady had said. After all, people have said a lot to me in my life. Eventually I learned not to put too much meaning behind their words.

A few days later my grandmother passed away. My family was on the verge of falling apart; my mother barely slept or ate anything for almost two weeks. My father, along with trying to find a job with a steady pay, had to keep my mother together, as well as keep the family going. No matter how much I wanted to help, he always smiled and told me to focus on my studies and let him do the rest. And that's what I did, because I didn’t know what to do other than work even Harder.



After a few weeks of me working my new job, our situation started improving; my mother was slowly returning to her normal self, and the atmosphere of home was lighter. Even though our spirits were lifting up, we were still struggling financially. My heart ached for the fact that I was nearly helpless, but my father insisted that I focus on school, reminding me constantly that a scholarship would lift an immense weight off his shoulders. Of course I knew he was right, but that didn't stop me from wanting to aid our money problem. We argued about this quite frequently, although it was never much of an argument, for in my religion speaking back to parents is a sin and extremely disrespectful. And so he would just shut down my idea while I silently fumed at him.

I once had one of these disputes with him prior to work. I checked out customers' items distractedly, replaying what my father had said to me in my head, like a video on repeat. As I scanned a bag of apples, someone spoke, "Are you alright, dear?"

Startled, I thought to myself, *had it been that blatant that something was wrong?* As I snapped my head up, my eyes met none other than the old lady from a few weeks ago. Putting on my customer friendly smile, I assured her, "Of course ma'am, everything is fine".

Doubtful, she questioned me again. "Are you sure? You look rather concerned about something. Is there anything I can do to help?"

She really was trying to be sweet, and it can be hard having to put on a cheerful front for everyone. I truly was exhausted, and so I let my face fall. "It's just that I've been having a lot of

arguments lately with my father. You see, my family is really struggling financially but he won't let me do more to help him because he wants me to focus on my studies. I just feel sort of helpless," I admitted to her all at once. I have to admit, it did feel good to let that off my chest after keeping it in for so long.

At first her expression went blank. *Great, now I've scared her*, I silently scolded myself, seconds before she surprised me with a warm smile. "I'll tell you what, I have a small shop just on the other side of town. I've been looking for someone to help around a little bit. Whatever your salary is here, I will pay you double. With my old age, it just gets harder and harder to do all the work around there," she sighed, looking so ancient and fragile. "I understand it must be hard to juggle this job and school already, dear. If you accept, you can come around whenever it works for you, just let me know beforehand".

At the time, it sounded like the golden offer. I mean, to be handed an opportunity like this and turn it down? Only a mad man would do such a thing! And if I was being paid double my current wage, I would be able to make enough money to support the family, at least until my father found a stable job. And with that, my decision was made.

"Ma'am, I don't know what to say. Thank you for the incredible offer, I would really love to work for you. I'm free next Saturday around 8, would that work?"

"Of course, honey, that will do just perfectly," she affirmed, scribbling what I assumed to be the shop's address on a small piece of paper. "I'll see you on Saturday, dear. Now you make sure to have a wonderful rest of the day". And with that, she grabbed groceries and exited the supermarket.

At the time all I felt was optimistic, like maybe my life wasn't so bad after all. Little did I know what was really in store for me.



Before I knew it, Saturday had arrived, I was ecstatic, anticipating the first day of my second job. I looked down at the address the lady had given me. On the way there I realized that I didn't even know the lady's name, nor did she know mine. That alone should have been a red flag, but my mind could only focus on one thing. It sounds sad when said out loud, but in my head this was possibly the thing that would bring our family out of poverty. My mind was racing, my heart pounded in my chest and my hands were damp with sweat. As I approached the tiny little shop on the corner of the street, my first thought was, *this is the place that's gonna save me.*

When I entered the shop, I was hit by a strong scent- it was an array of different spices, and it tickled the inside of my nostrils. Rubbing my nose, I made my way through a long purple curtain in the back, calling out. "Hello?". No reply. The room was dark, and as I cautiously walked on I hit my foot with something. I picked it up to see two eyes staring back at me. I immediately dropped it, yelping and jumping back. "Ya Allah, It's just a dolls head", I sighed, relieved. I was shaken, but I was determined to make this job work. As I took a few more steps I spotted an outline of light on one of the walls. It was a door, one that I thought would lead to the back. *Maybe she's in the back,* I thought to myself, and decided to go through the door.

Just as I placed my hand on the doorknob, something suddenly covered my head, and I was jerked back. "Hey!" I cried out as I fell to the floor. Before I knew it someone was on top of

my, tying up my hands. I frantically tried to escape the strangers grasp, but it was of no use. From the way they were holding me down and how heavy they were, I was able to work out that I was being tied up by a male, and a big one at that. There was no chance of me escaping, but that didn't stop me from trying. I squirmed around, trying to get on my back, and then started blindly kneeling the heavy bastard on top of me. I was hoping to get a good enough hit to stun him for a few seconds, just enough for me to escape. I succeeded in getting a clean blow to the groin, but just as I was about to make a run for it I was hit on the head with something heavy and metal. The last thing I remember is croaking out a measly "*please,*" before I was plunged into unconsciousness.



I woke up with a terrible headache. In a daze, I sat up, trying to figure out where I was. *What had happened? How did I get here?* As I stood up I heard a familiar sound- It was the sound of metal chains. *Why were there chains here?* Nothing was making any sense to me, and all I wanted to do was go home. *Yes, that's what I'll do, I'll go home and have a nice bath and apologize to baba,* I decided. However, when I tried to walk, I couldn't. My ankle wouldn't go any further than a few inches, and there was something digging into my skin. I reached down to feel the chains I had heard earlier, only then realizing there were attached to my ankle. And just like that, everything that happened came back to me. My body was filled with a horrible feeling; the feeling of pure dread.

I need to get out, I thought as I desperately searched the floor for something to aid me. “Ya Allah, Ya Allah, Ya Allah,” I chanted to myself, praying for a means of escape. I looked like a madwoman, but I couldn’t care less. While I searched, I realized I still had my hijab on, meaning I also had the pins. I quickly took one off and started playing around with the chain lock. “Come on, come on,” I mumbled to myself, just as I managed to successfully pick the lock. Relief flooded my body, I was going to live! Or so I thought.

Just as I stood up to head for a door in the corner of the room, a middle aged man walked through it. “Excellent, you’re awake my dear”. *My dear?* I was bewildered, did this man usually find passed out girls like this? “Come along, it’s time,” he smiled at me, a smile too kind for the situation.

“T-time for what?” I croaked, having no clue what to expect.

He chuckled. “Why, our wedding of course”. My heart dropped into my stomach.

Wedding? Is this man crazy?

I was frozen in shock. My mind was racing, my heart was pounding, I couldn’t think, I couldn’t *breath*. As I opened my mouth to try and respond, a pair of rough hands grabbed my waist, and in the blink of an eye I was hoisted over a large man's shoulders. As he started walking, I started violently fidgeting around and shouting, “No! There’s been a mistake! Please, I need to go home!” I violently sobbed. “P-please, let me go”. No one even blinked in response. It was as if they were deaf to my pleas.

After walking a few feet we arrived at a sad little altar. There was an old man in a grey suit waiting for us, and he had a bible in his hand. *No*, I was mortified. Not only was I being forced to marry a random man, it was also going to be a christian wedding. My faith was one of

the most important things to me, and losing it- I couldn't even begin to imagine. All of a sudden I was filled with a newfound rage, and before I knew it I was violently biting at the person who carried me. They screamed, dropping me, and I immediately stood up and made a run for it. I had only run a few yards before I was shot in the arm with something. I pulled it out and gazed down at the tranquilizer dart laying in my hand, a fog filling my head. Everything was a haze, as if I was dreaming.

Someone came to take me back to the altar, and there I stood, having no sense of anything that was happening. They told me to say "I do," and I obliged, not knowing any better. The last thing I remember from the wedding is seeing a flash of lighting in the sky and feeling the rain on my skin, just before I was thrown into a truck.



In the past years I have had my share of attempts at escape, with no success. I miss my family terribly, and it breaks my heart not knowing whether they're even alive or not. I no longer feed myself with fruitless lies and the hope of escaping; the only thing I have left now is my faith. In my time of need, the only thing that has kept me going is knowing that Allah is always with me. No matter how bad my situation gets, he will never put upon me something I can't handle. Although my life may not have been too pleasant, I work everyday to make sure my afterlife is different, for that is all I have.



لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَءَاتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى
حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَأَبْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ
وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا
عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ
صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ



Meaning: Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous. (2;177)

This ayah talks about freeing slaves, and people who are sold to other people and passed around like objects can be counted as slaves. It is our duty as muslims to help them in whatever way possible.