

Similar Stories

**Wives:  
the H of Heaven in Hell**

Somoud Damiri

### Similar Stories

**Wives: the H of Heaven in Hell**

**Somoud Damiri**

First edition 2023

ISBN 978-9950-8582-1-3

Design and Print at Emerezian Est.

print@emerezian.com

Published and Distributed by the Educational Bookshop

Salah Eddin Street - Jerusalem/Palestine

www.educationalbookshop.com

Translated by Alice S. Yousef

Edited by Ranan Issa Abu Shanab

and Shadin Nassar

جميع الحقوق محفوظة، لا يُسمح بإعادة إصدار هذا الكتاب أو أي جزء منه أو تخزينه في نطاق استعادة المعلومات أو نقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، دون إذن خطي من المؤلف.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever without express written permission from the author.

This book was printed as part of the Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy, and Accountability (YW4A) project, implemented in partnership with the Gender Justice Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the Faith to Action Network, and funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Foreword

A mask can be an unfriendly thing. So she takes it off, blushing, and begins her stories, confiding in me. She is like a daughter of mine, an honest friend who always speaks the truth.

She has always shared stories with me: stories of women who have been to hell and back, who have suffered unjustly due to unforeseen circumstances, leading them to a dreadful fate: hell. These are stories of truly victimized women. And something dark surges through my veins every time she shares one of their stories.

Being a righteous judge, it is only natural for her to bear the weight of those painful and heartbreaking stories. She carries their tears and her own, returning home with a heavy heart, struggling to breathe under the weight of the burdens and horrors that befell them.

Judge Somoud Damiri needed a friend to lend a listening ear, to help lighten the weight on her chest. And I, being a devoted confidant, was there for her. As she spoke, she took great care to avoid mentioning any names, dates, or places, ensuring the privacy and protection of the victims and all those involved.

Somoud initially hesitated to share these stories. But with a little nudge, I encouraged her to write and share them with others to raise awareness—or at least shed light on the darkness without defaming or airing dirty laundry.

After a change of heart and a newfound courage, Somoud was convinced to share the stories without revealing any personal details. I have reviewed the stories while respecting her wish to

maintain anonymity, and I made some partial changes to ensure that the stories align with a literary plot without altering their essence, credibility, or minimizing their tragic nature.

During the third annual conference held in December 2022 in Ramallah, titled "Gender Justice from a National and Religious Perspective," Judge Somoud presented a research paper. She briefly alluded to the stories without providing any specific details. One of the conference's recommendations was to compile these stories and publish them in a booklet, with the intention of highlighting an aspect of society that is often neglected.

Personally, I feel that dreams are a waste of precious sleep, as I consider dwelling on the past—particularly when discussing tragedies and disasters—to be unproductive. Upon deeper reflection, I believe that if we observe our society, or any society, with deep scrutiny and detachment, we may discover aspects that are peculiar or even more bizarre and surreal than initially perceived.

Somoud's literary works deeply resonate with me, stirring a rustling sensation akin to a gentle whisper coursing through my veins, slowly expanding. Yet, as I read, no words of sweetness escape my mouth; instead, I find myself consumed with curses and darkness.

We are all aware that we are under the weight of dual oppressions; the occupation and the heavy burden of our cultural heritage. It is imperative that we dismantle these burdens and confront the challenges they pose. We must also strive to cleanse the festering wounds and scars until they heal.

No individual is innately immoral, deviant, homicidal, or fixated. Rather, these traits are often the result of a complex interplay

of circumstances, faithless upbringing, and other factors that converge and drive individuals towards the brink of darkness. There are social legacies and inheritances that have been tarnished, dissolved, or lost to the shadows, transforming into ruthless insects that prey on the very essence of our humanity.

Judge Somoud's stories, driven by her unwavering determination to rectify errors and transcend sins, represent a genuine human endeavor. They are not bound by the rules of conventional literature, nor do they conform to any established school of thought. Instead, they are raw and unfiltered, meant to be conveyed with a sense of urgency and clarity. The stories are intended to be communicated in a clear and straightforward manner, akin to a storyteller cautioning us about the perils that lie beneath our feet. It serves as a resounding voice, imploring each individual to take proactive measures in order to avert the harrowing disintegration of our society and the interconnectedness we once believed to be secure. These stories serve as a raw and unadorned lamentation, aiming to instill both listeners and victims with a sense of trepidation. They aspire to unveil our ears to other narratives, ones that are grounded in reason, beauty, and humanity. Ultimately, my hope is to witness Somoud's face radiating with joy, devoid of anger or regret for the tragedies that bloom in the darkness.

Thank you, Somoud, for your literary bravery and unwavering commitment to safeguarding the privacy of the victims. Your message has been received with utmost appreciation, my friend.

**Dr. Al-Mutawakel Taha.**

## Introduction

Bismillah (in the name of Allah), may peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah Muhammad, and his righteous companions. I express my gratitude to Allah for granting me the opportunity to share my 13 years of judicial expertise, which I continue to apply to this day. This experience has bestowed upon me valuable insights into different facets of our lives, enabling me to comprehend the ways in which family harmony can be disrupted, ultimately resulting in public disputes within the judicial system.

As a legal practitioner serving individuals from diverse age groups, I have had the privilege of assisting in a wide array of cases, including transactions, marital and divorce proceedings, parental disputes, matters concerning minors and orphans, inheritance disputes, and many others. These files have consistently found their way onto my desk, affording me the opportunity to collaborate with litigants from all corners of Palestine, including those living abroad as refugees. Throughout the years, I have reviewed thousands of cases and deliberated over numerous lawsuits, often without prior knowledge of the parties involved. It has been captivating to witness the varied interactions and approaches taken by litigants, even when confronted with the same underlying legal issue.

I couldn't help but observe the significant impact of the political divisions, particularly the division of Palestine into areas A, B, and C, further compounded by the partition of Palestinian territories into Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. As

I delved deeper into the legal landscape, I began to discern the emergence of legal pluralism, where Palestine became divided not only politically but also legally. This division extended to religious and sectarian laws, impacting not only the Palestinian sense of identity but also various rights and aspects of citizenship. These divisions intersected with different environments, such as urban areas, rural regions, Bedouin communities, and camp environments, which emerged as a consequence of the occupation. All of these elements are intertwined with heritage, encompassing customs, traditions, identity, and religion, as well as the advancements of the modern era, particularly in the realm of technology.

As I reflect on my childhood, I can vividly recall the primary sources of guidance being my parents, grandparents, and the influence of our extended family and neighborhood. Teachers also played a significant role in shaping my worldview, and I fondly remember engaging in discussions with them. Television viewing was limited, and I don't recall any negative discussions about children's programs or series. It seemed as if they were carefully curated to ensure a positive impact on children's upbringing. Our understanding of politics relied on direct observation of current events and news bulletins from the two available television stations. Beyond that, our access to information was limited, except for the occasional Arab film shown once a week, which was often monitored or prohibited by our mothers. In my childhood, strict adherence to routine was the norm. Sleep was early for everyone, even for adults, as the day was filled with work, study, and various activities, while the

night was reserved for rest. These rules were applied smoothly for all.

The transformation in family dynamics and the increase in divorce rates have become quite noticeable. In my childhood, it was rare to hear about family problems leading to divorce. While occasional outbursts of anger did occur, there was always strong familial intervention and an emphasis on the endurance and permanence of marriages, even during challenging times. So, what has caused this shift? Have our moral values become less disciplined? Have we grown more indifferent to what is right and wrong? Has the significance of the family diminished in our minds? Has individualism taken precedence over the unity of the family? Are we facing more resource constraints in our lives? Have we lost our ability to follow through, especially when it comes to the details? Has the role of the father declined? Are working mothers dedicating excessive time to their careers? Are the rising prices making it more challenging to sustain a family? Are religious and moral values weakening? Could it be that the changes we are witnessing are a result of the occupation? Has the occupation weakened our ability to enforce laws, leading to the theft of our resources and land? Does the occupation's control over the air, sky, and borders restrict our freedom and worship, resulting in a narrowed perspective?

It appears that the influences impacting the upbringing of our children have multiplied, infiltrating our lives without our consent, and our ability to manage them seems limited. Additionally, our effectiveness in managing time has diminished. Despite the remarkable advancements in education, life has not

progressed as much as we had hoped. In the past, education provided opportunities for individuals to attain social positions and elevate their status within society.

Nowadays, we find ourselves constantly lamenting and closely monitoring plans, efforts, and resources aimed at addressing what we perceive as a series of societal breakdowns. So, what has led to this situation?

Based on my observations, it appears that the practice of early marriage among girls under the age of 18 is often supported and encouraged in certain communities, being perceived as an aspiration. Upon examining their living conditions, it becomes evident that marriage is frequently portrayed as the sole viable option for them. In some instances, these girls come from remote areas situated far from urban centers, thereby severely limiting their educational opportunities and access to schools beyond the primary level. Pursuing education beyond secondary school can also present formidable challenges for these girls, as secondary schools may not be accessible in their residential areas. Consequently, girls may be compelled to relocate, necessitating the provision of safe and affordable transportation, as well as the financial capacity of their parents to cover daily expenses and university tuition fees, should they manage to reach that stage.

These disparities in living conditions and areas, such as healthcare, legal aid, access to information, communication capabilities, self-empowerment, and economic resources, highlight the varying levels of protection individuals enjoy within society.

They also shed light on the ability of official and civil institutions to intervene and provide necessary safeguards.

As I approach the 20th anniversary of my career, my memory is filled with numerous observations. I am eager to share my experiences and express my commitment to the essence of the saying attributed to Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, may God honor his legacy. This saying emphasizes that every person is destined to excel in the talents they possess. I hold this principle in the highest regard and have applied it in my roles as a wife, mother, and particularly in my professional career, in the field of judiciary. This saying has been an endless source of inspiration, fueling my passion for continuous learning.

My aim is to remind people of the fundamental virtues that define us and uphold the sacred trinity of life, dignity, and freedom that has been preserved for generations. Unfortunately, some have strayed from the path of righteousness, exploiting their fellow beings and disregarding their dignity and freedoms. These heinous acts, condemned even by God, violate human rights and undermine our moral framework. Without nurturing the values of the trinity, our society cannot thrive, nor can we truly be humane.

Many individuals have pursued language learning without fully understanding the associated cultures or studying how human interactions have shaped them over time. While diplomacy and etiquette training have captivated many, there have not been adequate measurement tools to assess the extent of our internal influence on these cultural aspects. Has this influence

positively or negatively affected our identity and customs? Are we making progress? Additionally, how do we critically analyze education advertisements and the transformation of education programs into mere trends? Even everyday activities like cinema, weddings, and beverages have been reduced to mere trends and fashion statements.

There is no shame in embracing fashion and trends for enjoyment. However, it is crucial to recognize the potential drawbacks associated with these practices. It is disconcerting when our children adopt such trends without the necessary guidance from their parents, especially during wedding rituals and in their daily lives.

While it is neither haram<sup>1</sup> nor disgraceful for the groom to allocate significant funds towards wedding expenses, it is worrisome when resorting to taking out a bank loan becomes necessary to cover these costs. Moreover, it is even more concerning when the focus of the newlyweds becomes solely fixated on the wedding ceremony itself, overshadowing the true essence and purpose of marriage. The absence of adequate guidance and advice from adults in this matter is perplexing.

When examining society from various perspectives, I have come across instances where sons engage in discussions with their mothers regarding the teachings they receive in Islamic education lessons. Some of these lessons depict women who wear perfume as adulteresses. Upon reflecting on the school curriculum, I find

---

1. Haram (Arabic): forbidden.

it challenging to articulate concepts such as homeland, borders, identity, customs, and traditions. Furthermore, the presence of occupation and conditional funding raises concerns about the nature of the Palestinian curriculum, which should promote values of tolerance and peace.

I personally feel a sense of alienation due to the legislation that incorporates Ottoman, Jordanian, and Egyptian texts, as well as Israeli military orders into various aspects of our lives. This is particularly disheartening considering that more than 30 years have passed since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Legislative Council. It is regrettable that we have yet to formulate a Palestinian personal status law, a Palestinian penal code, or nationality law that provides a clear definition of the Palestinian identity.

I contemplate the provision of services that have been shaped within the confines of political considerations and temporary political solutions. This approach has unfortunately led to the perpetuation of exclusion, creating marginalized segments of society. As I stay informed through the news, I come to realize that several factors contribute to this fragmentation. The first factor lies in our national capacity to uphold rights and ensure security in specific regions. The second factor points to the occupation as a hindrance to accessing services in other Palestinian territories, resulting in the deprivation of essential services for citizens, including those living in the camps. It is disheartening to observe the absence of the camps in service and planning documents, often overlooked even by UNRWA, whose role seems to diminish

with each passing day. Consequently, individuals are left with no choice but to seek refuge in larger cities or even internationally. We shall conduct a comprehensive evaluation that begins by revisiting the core principles of individuality. It is essential to establish a precise definition of the term "Palestinian," that encompasses faith, gender, political diversity, refuge, and aligns all regulations with our cultural customs and traditions. It is imperative to eliminate any regulations that contradict our principles, values, and customs in order to shape the society we desire. A scientific approach should be employed, where history is scrutinized accurately, rationally, and without prejudice. We must resist any attempts at control, especially those who exploit religion for public influence. Additionally, it is crucial to suppress any instigators of conflicts, particularly those who try to frame our plans as a patriarchal versus feminist debate.

Monitoring both official and unofficial budgets using a scientific approach is necessary, as they are raised and expended in the name of the Palestinian people. Efficient time management is also important, as we should cherish every moment of our lives and not be caught off-guard by the swift passage of time. Proper resource management, especially in terms of finances, is crucial to avoid falling into the trap of debts, loans, and overconsumption. By doing so, we can move beyond the status of being aid-receiving developing countries and catch up with developed nations. Diversifying our professions, particularly in the field of technology, is essential for understanding its production and gaining control over it, rather than being controlled by it. To progress forward, we must revise our self-talk and public

discourse, leaving behind conspiracy theories. The responsibility lies upon us, and it is imperative that we take action.

I believe it is important for us to unite and defend our shared humanity, as God intended. As a woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and judge, I consider it my solemn duty to pen stories that serve as reminders to both myself and those who read them, emphasizing our responsibility to ensure that no one is left behind. This book encompasses similar stories of women who have endured various injustices, including the perpetuation of toxic masculinity endorsed even by women, inheritance disputes driven by greed, distorted notions of honor, a dreading of values, and the elevation of tribalism over the rule of law under the guise of civil peace. It requires great courage to challenge dissenting opinions without hesitation, to reject prescribed gender roles, and to utilize God's holy spaces to preach against such roles. It takes courage to refrain from labeling anyone with a beard as a "Sheikh." We must refrain from romanticizing the past, impeding critical thinking, and suppressing those who seek to question or engage in meaningful debates.

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to God for His benevolence, and grace be to Him for my success. I extend my appreciation to Dr. Al-Mutawakel Taha for assisting me in sharing a portion of my experience with you. His support has granted me the freedom to address my humanity, femininity, motherhood, and conscience,

allowing me to speak publicly and reach a wider audience beyond the confines of my familiar professional environment.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, under the esteemed leadership of Bishop Sani Azar, for their invaluable support in endorsing the "Al-Hakimat Council" initiative. This initiative, which I co-founded alongside my esteemed colleague, Judge Scarlet Bishara, has been made possible through her invaluable support.

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my parents, whose upbringing instilled within me a profound sense of values that have ultimately led me to the position I hold today. I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supportive husband, who has consistently encouraged my ambitions, as we jointly shoulder the responsibility of nurturing our children with consciousness and sagacity, while upholding the cherished values that we both hold dear, recognizing our duty to pave the way for future generations.

Lastly, I extend my appreciation to all my dear friends for their unwavering support.



---

## The First Story

---

It is difficult to establish a clear definition of a “person with a mental health condition.” Consequently, we encounter a perplexing inquiry: is it permissible for a man with a mental health condition to enter into the sacred bond of marriage with a woman who does not have such a condition? When we attempt to explore this question, the dearth of comprehensive information impedes our ability to provide a definitive answer. The absence of an accurate diagnosis hampers our assessment of whether the condition in question is pathological, urgent, chronically benign, or a state of a complete madness, which makes that person incapable of comprehending the significance of marriage and its responsibilities.

In many instances, the legal guardian of a person with a mental health condition may approach the judiciary, seeking authorization to facilitate the union of their son or brother in matrimony. Regrettably, the presiding judge often overlooks the examination of potential harm or the underlying interests at stake. This begs the question: what interests truly lie at the heart of this matter?

This happens generally, yet this story is a familiar one, prompting us to raise an alarm and draw attention to its significance. It is imperative for the judiciary to reconsider the interests at stake, extending beyond the mere words transcribed on legal documents, prior to granting consent for matrimonial unions involving individuals with mental health conditions. A comprehensive and discerning approach to the law is essential,

encompassing the requisite intricacies to establish a robust foundation for prosperous marriages.

Our story begins as follows, there resided a man blessed with several daughters and a son burdened with a mental health condition. As the son neared the age of marriage, the father found himself beset by apprehension. Perhaps he feared the death of a male heir to carry forth the family name, or perhaps he harbored concerns that his sons-in-law, upon his passing, would seize the entirety of his hard-earned inheritance.

In light of these anxieties, what path did the father choose to traverse?

He searched far and wide in remote villages, seeking out a humble household enticed by a generous dowry. His goal was to find a girl who would accept his son as her husband. Eventually, he discovered such a family. However, his son struggled to grasp the concept of marriage, despite the girl's efforts to encourage him to engage in a physical relationship with her in the hopes of conceiving a child, thus easing the father's anxiety.

The girl yearned for intimacy, while the son was content with a simple kiss on the cheek, treating her like a mother or sister. Despite the passing weeks and months, the girl remained a virgin, alone in her cold bed.

It seemed that the father-in-law had lost his patience, overwhelmed by his desire for his daughter-in-law to become pregnant by his son. Fueled by and assured of his son's helplessness, the father closed the doors and raped his daughter-in-law, who was in shock from the horror of the surprise. Blatantly, he convinced her that there was no way for him to save the family's money except by the presence of a grandson.

The father continued his crazy game, pressing her body against his for several months, until her belly swelled with a child.

At night, the daughter-in-law would curl up and cry herself to sleep. It appeared that she had confided in her husband about his father's actions. Perhaps the story ended with the husband retrieving a machete from the kitchen, opening the door to his sleeping father's room, and slitting his throat, as if the notion of honor stirred something within him, despite his mental health condition. He may have even laughed at the sight of the blood, not hearing his wife's screams of terror at the sight of blood that flowed from the father-in-law's room to her bed.

Or perhaps the story had another ending: the son was unaware of his father's actions, but jealousy had taken hold of the mother, who could not bear to see her husband sleeping with her daughter-in-law, so she went to the judge and exposed the matter. The police brought everyone in, and the investigation began. The daughter-in-law confessed and the father-in-law confessed without shame. It has been said that the father-in-law gave the girl drugs until she became addicted. Subsequently, he began blackmailing her with potentially lethal doses. Eventually, he took her to a house in a nearby village and continued exploiting her.

After the father-in-law was imprisoned, the daughter-in-law returned home with her husband just as she was about to give birth. The mother-in-law was devastated by what her husband had done and passed away. The husband, filled with joy, carried the newborn child, not realizing that this baby was his own brother.

It is true that ignorance is bliss.

---

## The Second Story

---

She married him, hoping for a fulfilling intimate connection. Yet, regrettably, he encountered challenges in terms of sexual performance. Despite this setback, she chose to remain silent, holding onto the hope that he may eventually be able to conceive. As time passed, the issue persisted, leaving the man with a profound sense of emasculation. What alternatives did he have at his disposal?

Residing in the urban center, he persuaded his bride that he would divorce her under the condition that she would subsequently marry his acquaintance once her iddah<sup>2</sup> had ended. How did he proceed?

He traveled with his bride to a neighboring country, where they drafted a fresh agreement permitting his friend to marry her. Upon their return to the city, the friend discovered that the bride was still a virgin, as her initial spouse had failed to consummate the union and bestow womanhood upon her. Initially, the bride resisted engaging in intimacy with her second husband to conceive a child and conceal her first husband's impotence, as it would entail a life of sin.

However, as more time passed, the woman became pregnant

---

2. Translator's note: Iddah is a prescribed period of waiting in the Islamic faith, which women must observe following the dissolution of their marriage, either by the death of their husband or by divorce, before they can remarry. The length of Iddah varies based on the particular circumstances and can last from four lunar months and ten days to three menstrual cycles or three lunar months. Its primary aim is to ensure that there are no uncertainties regarding the paternity of any children that may be conceived after a woman's marriage has ended.

on a few occasions by her second husband, who would visit and cohabit with her before returning to his own residence. Meanwhile, her impotent husband resided in a separate room, upholding the facade of being the household's patriarch while providing financial support for the woman and her children, who were legally registered under his name. Despite their unconventional arrangement, the woman and her sexually capable husband (the second one, that is) gradually developed deep emotions and a strong bond over the years.

A decade later, the biological father of the children sought to assert his parental rights. However, the impotent husband had legally acknowledged the children as his own due to the marital contract he had with the mother.

The second husband was unable to provide a copy of his marriage contract from the country where he got married, as it was discovered that the sheikh who officiated the marriage, and the witnesses were fraudulent. The children, who were beginning to understand life, innocently referred to the second man as their biological father - "Baba/Dad" - without conflicting with the presence of the first man.

The woman was held captive by fear of scandal, violence, and the future repercussions when her children would inevitably discover the truth. Despite her innocence in the matter, her attempts to speak out were stifled by the weight of those who felt emasculated. Eventually, the burden became overwhelming, and she felt as though she was drowning. Even with many years of life ahead and living children, she was unable to escape the haunting memories and the fear of her children learning the truth. She anxiously awaited their growth, yet the knowledge that they

might come to understand the truth gnawed at her.

The first husband, who had lost his sense of masculinity, continued to harm himself out of fear for the future, despite his misguided actions. It is concerning to think about the potential consequences: the woman's mental state may be driven to madness by grief, her family members devastated by the truth, her children experiencing intense emotional distress, and even the judge presiding over the case may be overwhelmed by the complexity of the situation.

---

### The Third Story

---

Did the presiding judge engage in wrongful conduct by fabricating factual details? Or can it be considered justifiable in this instance, as the judge made a minor "modification" to ensure legal protection for a young woman who bore a child with a man she loved, but without a marriage contract and in secrecy?

The story begins with a second-year university student hailing from a respectable family, renowned for her beauty. She develops romantic feelings for a university cafeteria worker who does not share a similar background, resulting in their engagement in a consensual intimate relationship.

Tragedy struck when she conceived a child with the cafeteria worker. In response, her mother arranged for her relocation to a distant university and procured a residence for her until she gave birth. Subsequently, the newborn was then placed in the custody of a financially disadvantaged family in exchange for a monthly salary.

This country was indeed small. Upon learning of the situation, the girl's father sought a solution that would uphold his daughter's honor. Ultimately, an agreement was reached with the cafeteria worker and his family, wherein a formal proposal for the girl's hand in marriage was put forth.

Amidst their anticipation of a forthcoming child, the couple made a strategic decision to relocate temporarily to a distant city. Their cunning plan involved waiting for some time and pretending that she had become pregnant during her travels. They then intended to return to their native city as visitors, accompanied by their child. However, the couple soon realized that the date of their marital contract needed to precede the birth of their child by a minimum of six months. In order to rectify this predicament, they approached a venerable judge and presented their case to him. They claimed to have undergone a customary marriage prior to the formal public contract, thus seeking validation. It appears that the judge, perhaps enlightened by the fact that he himself had a university-educated daughter who might have shared a connection with the young mother, comprehended the underlying motives behind their plea.

Now, the pivotal question arises: How did the judge respond to their plea? In an unexpected turn of events, the judge granted their request, bestowing retrospective legitimacy upon their marriage. It appears that the judge found reassurance in ensuring that all was harmonious in the world!

---

## The Fourth Story

---

I didn't expect her to push the door so forcefully and shout, "He's my son!"

It didn't take long for me to realize that she was dealing with a mental illness or had some sort of abnormality.

I was able to calm her down and gently guide her to sit down. As she continued to express her emotions ranging from talking, crying, screaming, calming down, smiling, shrinking, and raging, I knew I had to take action. Recognizing who she was, I asked a helpful neighbor from the same area to assist in safely returning her to her family. Little did I know, what I was about to hear next was truly unbelievable.

It was revealed that she was diagnosed with a mental condition and had conceived a child three years ago. The paternity of the child remains uncertain, as there have been rumors circulating about potential exploitation by various male family members, including cousins and uncles. To prevent any scandal, she was kept secluded in her room until the time of delivery. A midwife from a neighboring village was brought to provide assistance during the childbirth. The family made the decision to officially register the newborn as the child of the woman's brother and his wife. The mother was retained to nurture the child, ensuring its optimal growth and development. It is conceivable that the family had intended for her to continue caring for the child, sparing the brother's wife from the obligation of raising a child she had not desired.

I found myself at a loss, unsure of what course of action to take, but ultimately, I had no choice but to accept a practical solution that veiled what God had deemed sacred. This solution was implemented to conceal what should have been brought to light, and the thoughts of this woman lingered persistently in my mind. A few days later, news reached me that she passed away in the hospital, and concerns arose about the possibility of foul play. However, it was later revealed that she had been taken to a private clinic for hysterectomy, a procedure aimed at preventing a recurrence of her distressing situation. The story of this tragedy continues to be told.

---

### The Fifth Story

---

The couple had been married for 25 years, yet they had not been blessed with the gift of children. They occupied the uppermost floor of their apartment building, while the wife's sister, who had been widowed, resided on the ground level. To outsiders, they presented themselves as a united family unit, engaging in shared meals and quality time together, all without arousing suspicion or encountering any peculiar occurrences.

The husband wholeheartedly embraced the widow's children as his own, showering them with compassion, kindness, and assuming the role of their caregiver. His wife actively participated in the parental duties as well, insisting that they address her as "mother." This familial bond provided solace to the widowed mother, enveloping her and her children in a cocoon of warmth, care, love, and tenderness.

The situation took a tumultuous turn when the widow and her sister's husband clandestinely began meeting, giving rise to an illicit relationship between them. Unfortunately, their actions did not escape the watchful eye of fate. As a consequence of their affair, the widow found herself with a child, and their secret liaison was exposed, resulting in a court case.

I must confess that I struggled to accept the proposed solution put forth by the man and his widowed sister-in-law: to register the newborn under the names of the husband and his wife, who had been unable to conceive, in order to prevent a scandal. However, the wife vehemently rejected this notion and went so far as to accuse her sister of immorality, vowing to bring ruin upon her.

After four long months of arduous negotiations, the wife finally agreed to assume the role of the child's mother on the condition that her widowed sister relocate to a distant residence.

A few days later, they approached me to finalize the necessary procedures and withdraw any allegations that had been made. To my utter surprise, I witnessed the newfound mother embracing the baby with a depth of love that seemed to emanate from her very soul.

The man tenderly presented the child, his son, placing him gently into the waiting arms of his wife. Initially, she held him with a hint of reluctance, but then something remarkable occurred. She drew him close to her chest, as if he were her own flesh and blood. The overwhelming power of motherhood eclipsed the

bitterness caused by her husband's betrayal, and she released the resentment she had held towards her sister's actions.

In that transformative moment, it felt as though divine love had poured into her heart, and what was once a scandalous situation was now transformed into a blessed journey, filled with grace.

---

### The Sixth Story

---

He was a man driven by impulsive and irrational tendencies, compelled to leave his village in pursuit of an elusive purpose within the city. By day, he slept away his hours, and by night, he aimlessly wandered, indulging in reckless pleasures without any sense of restraint. It appears that he got involved in a forbidden romance with a destitute girl from a different religious background, and their intimacy resulted in her pregnancy. Fearing the wrath of her family, the couple sought refuge at his parents' house.

As the Second Intifada began, this impulsive young man found himself among the wanted security suspects pursued by Palestinian freedom fighters. Desperate for safety, he sought shelter among the very people considered his adversaries. The girl, who had given birth to a baby boy, entrusted the child to his grandmother, grandfather, and uncles, while she herself returned to the city. Out of pity, her family took her back, but ultimately decided it would be best for her to start a new life in America. Due to the grandmother's illness, she was unable to provide care for her grandson, prompting the family to bring him to an

orphanage. After the passage of 23 years, the mother returned from America, overcome by an undeniable urge to reconnect with her child's grandparents. However, she received the devastating news that her child had been given a different name and lineage, and all contact had been lost after his placement in the orphanage. Determined to find her son, who had already completed his university education, but had no idea about his family's story. She was determined to prove his true parentage and reunite him with his real father through a customary marriage and witnesses. The mother's unwavering determination led her to seek my assistance in unraveling their family's untold story. However, before I could complete the case file, I received devastating news that the father had tragically been shot in the chest while engaging in a confrontation with a soldier, after attempting to stab him.

A friend of mine revealed that the young man had spent his entire life searching for his true origins. Despite receiving care and education at the shelter, his longing to uncover his roots persisted. It was more than mere curiosity; it was a profound desire to understand his identity. Miraculously, guided by what seemed like divine intervention, his mother reappeared, bringing with her a flood of memories from her son's earliest days. The past, in its enigmatic nature, defies comprehension, affirming its presence while simultaneously rejecting it, yearning for resolution. In this complex narrative, the father's past mistake is discredited within the context of a profound sense of martyrdom, opposing any form of dominance or subjugation imposed by the occupation.

---

## The Seventh Story

---

The flames of a fire can only burn so brightly, casting a warm glow with its embers. Despite the mother's relentless personal efforts, she found herself facing the looming shadow of financial hardship as her three daughters blossomed into young women, their bodies developing curves reminiscent of pears and apples. Sadly, there seemed to be no means to adequately support them. While the mother could have sought employment to provide for her family, her pride prevented her from doing so. In her eyes, only a magical wand could rectify her dire reality. But where could such a mystical tool be found?

It turns out, the answer was right there in front of them all along: The three daughters possessed an exquisite beauty that captivated the hearts of many suitors, opening the doors wide for marriage proposals.

When a suitor came along, the mother wasted no time and requested an immediate cash dowry, a substantial sum indeed! The suitor willingly paid the requested dowry and stayed with his fiancée, without the traditional Kateb-il Kitab<sup>3</sup> ceremony or official documentation of the impending marriage.

---

3. Translator's note: The Kateb-il kitab or Nikah ceremony is an Islamic religious marriage ceremony that is used to document the terms of the marriage contract. This contract is a binding legal agreement between the bride and groom and specifies their rights and responsibilities in the marriage. Once the terms are settled, the bride, groom, and witnesses sign the kateb kitab to finalize the marriage. After the signature and after holding a wedding party, the marriage can be consummated. A break of the nikah means divorce. This is a legal document and is often kept by the couple as proof of their marriage.

The second and third suitors were also matched with their brides and paid their dowries. Surprisingly, even the mother herself did not mind being betrothed to anyone, despite the wisdom and gray hair that the passing years had bestowed upon her. What mattered most to her was that the suitors paid in cash and were rewarded with the fruits of her labor, just like her daughters and their suitors.

Unfortunately, one of the suitors engaged in a sexual relationship with his fiancée before completing the official marriage procedures, known as Kateb-il Kitab, and without celebrating the union with a wedding party.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the daughter became pregnant. The mother, concerned about preserving the virginity of her two daughters who were engaged to be married, took her to a private clinic for an abortion and subsequently ended the relationship with the fiancé. She took similar actions with the second and third suitors.

Over the course of a few weeks, the mother consistently welcomed young men into her home. They would come, pay, and engage in intimate relations with her daughters. However, the mother would then dismiss these "grooms," claiming that they had overstepped boundaries and taken advantage of her daughters. Interestingly, each of the daughters had been engaged multiple

---

4. Translator's note: In Islamic lore and religious practice, a marriage has to be done first by the reciting of Al-Fatiha Surah (part of the Holy Quran), which unofficially replicates a wedding proposal. The official religious ceremony entails both a family-only Kateb-il kitab (see above), then Ishar, or announcing the marriage to the general public by throwing a party. After all of these 'steps' are concluded the religious marriage is considered official. However, consummation of the marriage is not advisable until after the wedding party, albeit officially tied/legally married with the Kateb il Kitab document (additionally court registry happens with the Kateb-il kitab ceremony at the Sharia court).

times, and each time they became intimate with the suitor because he had provided financial support and a sense of security.

The mother persisted in arranging these betrothals, while collecting money. Regrettably, the house became tainted with an unfavorable reputation, and the town could no longer bear the ongoing practice of prostitution disguised as religious engagements and dowries.

Tragically, a group of enraged young men resorted to violence, attacking and setting fire to the house while its residents were still inside. The resulting blaze left the house charred, with only one daughter managing to survive. Furthermore, the fire had inflicted damage upon her womb while pregnant, leaving her alone in a women's shelter without the company of her sisters or a suitor.

---

### The Eighth Story

---

It is commonly known that the laws of the occupation are applicable to Arab and Muslim citizens residing in the territories occupied in 1948. Consequently, men are legally restricted to having only one wife, with polygamy being prohibited. However, there may be instances where men desire to enter into a second marriage for various reasons, such as the desire for a male heir, seeking personal pleasure, or due to the illness of their first wife. In such cases, what alternatives are available to them?

Interestingly, it appears that these men have found a solution by engaging the services of marriage brokers or seeking out women who know of young brides. These brokers and women assist in

finding brides from impoverished families who are willing to act as surrogate mothers. These women become pregnant, and upon the birth of the child, the "husband" registers the child under the name of his first wife. Subsequently, the woman who carried the baby is returned to her family.

The prevalence of this phenomenon continued to escalate, with numerous instances of women under the legal age of marriage being wedded through customary marriage certificates (i.e., an oral contract drawn up by a sheikh who legitimizes such rituals). This practice further established a pattern involving the division of dowries among suitors and brokers. No official ceremony took place, except for the embellishment of the bride, who was sent to a man known only by his first name.

Tragically, one daughter, sold by her family, managed to escape from her purchaser's home and sought refuge at a police station shortly before giving birth. Although her family promised not to harm her, her lifeless body was later discovered in a remote field. It appears that her brother, unaware of the situation, may have taken her life in an attempt to conceal the family's actions and restore their honor. The investigation into this case is still ongoing.

The story does not conclude here; certain women, burdened by the sorrow of parting with their newborns and leaving them behind, find themselves compelled to return to their families only to be coerced into marriage once again. The suitors who propose to them make grand pledges of treating them with utmost care and providing financial support, yet their true motive lies solely in their desire for offspring. These young women, coerced by their parents, endure a life marked by unfulfilled aspirations,



repeatedly entering into marriages as a means to an end, all in the pursuits of securing a better life for their parents. Their deepest apprehension? The relentless cycle of denial.

What is the rationale behind the parents' actions, you may ask? They firmly believe that marrying off their daughters in accordance with the religious tenets of Islamic marriage and adhering to the Sunnah of the Prophet is the righteous path to follow!

In the same neighborhood, a comparable tale unfolded: a 14-year-old girl, whose family and the broker shared the monetary gains. Clad in white attire, she was sent off with the groom, unaware of the exact location of his residence. Who were the young bride's prospective in-laws? Did she encounter a stern mother-in-law, as frequently depicted in our Arab traditions, or a malevolent sister-in-law? The most pressing question remains: how will the first wife receive the arrival of the new young bride?

A whole month had passed since the young bride had stepped foot into her new house and consummated her marriage. Throughout this period, the first wife subjected her to brutal beatings, resulting in profuse bleeding. Eventually, she callously abandoned the new bride at a military checkpoint, where she was fortuitously rescued by a group of young men. The subsequent involvement of the police and the courts aimed to establish the legitimacy of the marriage and validate the divorce that the husband had purportedly declared. As the first wife dragged the young bride's bloodied body to the checkpoint, a year later, the resilient young bride found employment in the 1948 Occupied Territories.

These distressing scenarios persist, yet the deafening silence prevails, with relentless, and multi-faceted massacres claiming countless lives, leaving behind a shattered existence sustained by meager crumbs of bread.

---

## The Ninth Story

---

In the empty household, only the youngest child remained. The father and eldest child ventured to work within the Green Line, spending the entire week away from home and returning only for two nights. The young boy, often engrossed in phone conversations or movie-watching, possessed a penchant for adventurous endeavors. One day, he resolved to embark on his own adventure.

Acquiring freshly pressed juice, he discreetly dissolved a sleeping pill within, which he then gave to his brother's wife. Motivated by his intense fascination with cinematic portrayals, he engaged in unseemly actions, replicating scenes and documenting himself engaging in relations with his brother's wife while she slept. Unexpectedly, his brother's wife became pregnant, leading everyone to believe that she had conceived during her husband's absence. Upon his return, the weary husband, exhausted from his labor, perceived this as a blessing from God, a reward for his unwavering patience and enduring hardships.

The only one who knew the truth was the almost-90-year-old grandmother. She had seen her devious grandson sneaking into his sister-in-law's room at night. However, the grandmother, afraid of the scandal, restrained her tears and sorrow, keeping

the secret to herself. After the pregnant woman had given birth to a boy who did not resemble his legitimate father, no one said a word because the features of the baby kept changing every day. The grandmother took matters into her own hands and called her grandson, sternly warning him against engaging in any further relations with his brother's wife. She made it clear that if he continued his actions, she would expose him and reveal the truth to all. What did the young brother do? He broke the newborn's neck and strangled his grandmother.

In a tragic tale of betrayal and despair, an adulterer and a killer emerged, leaving behind a trail of two unmistakable victims. The shocking twist came when a third victim, entangled in the web of adultery, faced the consequences of her actions and was ultimately divorced by her husband. The weight of his emotions pushed him to the brink, contemplating the unthinkable act of ending her life.

The reckless young boy, driven by his fascination with movies, decided to play a dangerous game. He cunningly feigned madness, utilizing a lawyer and a fabricated document declaring him as mentally unstable to evade legal consequences. Miraculously, he was released without facing prosecution. Returning home, he continued to deceive his family, gradually convincing them of his supposed insanity. Even his betrayed older brother fell for the ruse, seeing it as an escape from their sordid past. Meanwhile, the woman involved in the heinous act faced rejection from her own family. Rumors circulated that she wandered the unfamiliar streets of a nearby city, dressed in unfamiliar attire, displaying herself, and waiting for someone to take her to their apartment. It was also said that she found protection from the security forces

in that area, but at a cost- she was compelled to work with them. Amidst her silent tears, only the nearby sea bore witness to her pain.

---

## The Tenth Story

---

The division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has had a detrimental impact on the national cause and has significantly affected various aspects of life. The communication channels between Gaza and the West Bank have been severed, depriving residents of both areas from connecting with each other. Additionally, the occupation has imposed restrictions that prevent Gazans from relocating to the West Bank, making it an unattainable dream for many. The occupation forces actively pursue and apprehend Gazans found in the West Bank. Similarly, entering the territories occupied in 1948 is met with intense scrutiny by the occupying forces, further exacerbating the already stringent restrictions imposed upon them.

This is blockade, closure, and suffocation.

A hardworking man, originally from Gaza, married a woman from the West Bank. The man was originally from Gaza and had moved to the West Bank 30 years earlier. Together, they nurtured a family of five children. Regrettably, certain conflicts arose within their relationship, compelling the man to make a difficult choice. He decided to gather his children and journeyed towards the Beit Hanoun crossing in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. There, he willingly surrendered himself to the occupying forces,

who subsequently transported him and his children to Gaza. Tragically, due to the prevailing restrictions, the mother, being from the West Bank, was prohibited from reuniting with her family in Gaza.

What course of action should she pursue? Her anguish was overwhelming, and her heart longed for her children. Despite her persistent pleas, she was consistently denied the opportunity to embrace them, and her husband adamantly refused to grant her a divorce. Remarkably, more than 15 years have transpired since the tragic incident unfolded. The passage of such a substantial amount of time is truly difficult to comprehend. However, the younger ones eventually reached adulthood and were able to persuade their father to embark on a journey to Cairo. There, their mother could finally embrace them and be reunited after a decade and a half of separation.

The woman had aged significantly, transitioning from her 30s to her 50s, and her spirit had grown bitter and weary. As she disembarked from the plane and stepped through the airport gate, she was greeted by the sight of her children, their arms open wide in a welcoming embrace. However, the overwhelming surge of emotions and the weight of her presence proved to be too much for her fragile state, causing her to lose consciousness and tragically pass away.

In a cruel twist of fate, her body now faced a new predicament. Stranded and without a final resting place, the children were left to grapple with the profound grief of her absence, coupled with the burden of dealing with her body. The complications arose from the fact that her body was forbidden to be buried in the

Gaza Strip, unable to return to the West Bank, and prohibited from finding its resting place in Cairo. The children found themselves caught in a heartbreaking conundrum, navigating the challenges of honoring their mother's memory while facing the constraints imposed upon them.

A suggestion was made to sell her body to medical students, with the promise of receiving a sum of money to cover their travel expenses, while also seeking eternal rewards from God.

However, dear readers, there is an untold aspect of this heart-wrenching story. The children's ability to travel to Cairo was made possible by a tragic event - the death of their father in the bombing of their home during the last war. It was his reluctance to allow his children to communicate with their mother in the West Bank that had kept them apart for so long.

---

## The Eleventh Story

---

Our story starts with a young woman residing in a remote village, distanced from the bustling city. Her family held steadfast to their tribal tradition, choosing to maintain their independent housing. As technology began to weave its way into the fabric of the village, our young heroine eagerly embraced the opportunities it brought. She found herself captivated by the charm of a peculiar young man, hoping he could introduce her to a different way of life. Their conversations were filled with peace, and he eventually asked to meet her in person. Little did she know, this was just the beginning of a much longer journey.

He whisked her away to a distant place, marking their first date.

took her quite a distance away. Overwhelmed by her emotions, her heart's innocence faltered, and in a vulnerable moment, she found herself engaging in an intimate encounter with this man. Overwhelmed by the gravity of her actions, returning home and resuming her usual routine within the confines of her community's strict customs was not a viable option. Her anxiety intensified as she felt like a wave that had carried her away, only to bring her back to the village.

On her journey back, she made a pivotal stop at the police station. Thoughts of the tragic fate suffered by numerous girls before her weighed heavily on her mind. This led to her placement in a protection center, where the unfolding story eventually led to the imprisonment of the young man. What began as a consensual affair had transformed into a legal basis for his imprisonment on charges of luring and sexually assaulting a girl. As is often the case, there were individuals who actively intervened, seeking to resolve the situation with the authorities through compensation. Eventually, a narrative was crafted, and her family came to believe that she had simply gone out for a brief period, returning unharmed with only innocent conversations exchanged. This ensured that the young man did not approach her or engage in intimate relations with her.

Bound by the sacred melody of honor, the family, following an Atwa,<sup>5</sup> made the decision to expedite a non-consumed marriage

---

5. Atwa (translator note): A term that entails a formal gathering of tribal leaders/family men to informally resolve a huge conflict such as murder, rape, or divorce. It is the tribal way of hosting a few family and extended family members/friends over coffee to settle the dispute by setting out-of-court "settlements," led by tribal men/elders to make peace; Atwas don't always have positive results or resolve the conflict.

ceremony through the signing of a contract, thereby commencing preparations for the official wedding.

In every story, there exists an individual who shares secrets, claiming to do so out of love and loyalty towards the family. Alternatively, there may be someone who takes pleasure in sowing discord and turmoil, lurking in the shadows or periphery of the story. It is also plausible that a family member is burdened with an insatiable curiosity, desperately searching for something concealed and elusive. Perhaps someone harbored doubts, as the rhythm of honor remained steadfast.

Consequently, the girls' brothers discovered that her virginity had been compromised, viewing it as an offense to the family's honor. They lay in wait along the path she traversed back to the village, and shot her, deeming it a triumph for their family's honor. Regrettably, both the girl and her mother lost their lives, met with a lack of mourning. In fact, the mother was held accountable for her daughter's actions. If she had been more vigilant, this tragedy might have been averted. The family transported the mother's body to her hometown, where she was laid to rest amidst solemn rituals and subdued prayers from other women, who internalized her story as a cautionary tale for themselves and their daughters. The bride found her final resting place beside her companion, destined to fade from memory. The perpetrators, on the other hand, faced the forfeiture of their personal rights in this case. Surprisingly, the father of the deceased sister was also the father of the murderers. The prevailing notion of justice in society supported this decision, as the deeply ingrained belief persists that men must bear the responsibility of upholding the throne of honor and safeguarding its integrity. An Arabic proverb

reverberates still: "Your brothers and father remain the crown over your head," a double-edged sword wielded more often for harm than for good.

---

## The Twelfth Story

---

In her early 20s, hailing from a modest background, a young woman embarked on her professional journey after completing her education. She avidly followed the latest fashion trends and the stories of her peers, some of whom were engaged, some recently married, and others, like her, navigating the aftermath of a failed engagement.

On occasion, she dabbled in the practice of "Zahzaha"—fortune-telling with her friends—and kept a keen eye on horoscopes. The heartbreak from her past engagement left her consumed with the desire to find a life partner and avoid the prospect of solitude. Eventually, she found herself engaged to a charming young man who shared her social status. However, as time passed, his behavior towards her became erratic, culminating in an abrupt and bewildering termination of their engagement.

Driven by her deep-rooted beliefs in superstition, she gradually immersed herself in the enigmatic realm of magic and sorcery. In her quest for solace, she sought out "sheikhs" who claimed to possess the power to alleviate her anguish, even at the expense of her meager salary. Her initial encounter led her to a "sheikh" who advised her to safeguard folded papers, cautioning her against opening them, lest they vanish into thin air. Disappointed by

the lack of improvement, she sought the guidance of another "sheikh" who assured her that she would soon encounter someone significant in her life.

Just days later, a man arrived, seeking her hand in marriage. Was it mere coincidence or the hand of destiny at play? Overwhelmed by anticipation, she hastily accepted his proposal, thus commencing her ongoing reliance on the assistance of the "sheikhs." Whenever her fiancé grew angry or she desired to deepen their bond, she would turn to a "sheikh" for aid. Regrettably, she got married without thoroughly investigating her husband and his family. As an orphan with a weary mother and younger siblings who lacked the means to object, she succumbed to her impulsive decision.

Our unfortunate bride found herself trapped in a tumultuous marriage with an alcoholic husband. As his evenings became consumed by alcohol, she turned to the "sheikhs" in a desperate attempt to find a solution. However, instead of finding resolution, the conflicts between them only intensified, eventually leading to her family discovering her involvement with magic. Her husband, claiming that his behavior had changed due to her supposed "jinni<sup>6</sup> possession," convinced her family to seek the help of a "sheikh." The "sheikh" prescribed a disturbing remedy involving physical punishment with belts and sticks for seven days while reciting the Holy Quran. Tragically, after four days, she ceased to move, leaving everyone uncertain whether she had

---

6. Translator's note: Jinn are mystical entities that feature in Islamic legends and Arabic folklore. They are made of flame that lacks smoke, and similar to humans, they possess free will, but are not visible to the naked eye unless they choose to manifest. Jinn can take control of individuals, grant wishes, or cause harm if provoked. Jinn have a profound influence on Middle Eastern culture and often represent intangible forces that shape human existence.

died or if the jinni had left her. The subsequent medical autopsy revealed the separation of skin from bone, possibly as a means of escape for the jinn or a natural response to alleviate pain. This heartbreaking death resulted from ignorance and reliance on black magic.

Do you want to hear the truly unfortunate part? It is disheartening to note that the penalty for the “sheikh” responsible for this tragedy is no more than a week in prison.

---

### The Thirteenth Story

---

The father was the “head of the family,” stern and strict. The family revolved around him as if he were their guiding light. His voice carried authority that commanded the attention of his family members. He led a busy life, seldom speaking more than necessary, as is often the case with individuals of his stature. Beyond being a business owner and esteemed figure in the community, he harbored a dark side—a secret known only through hushed whispers. One of his three daughters was engaged to one of his business associates, and they were involved in an underground business that included arms trade.

The daughter, although quiet and educated, found herself in a difficult situation when her fiancé was tragically killed. The circumstances surrounding his death were kept hidden from her, leaving her with no knowledge of how, where, and when it happened. Unfortunately, her father’s stern expression discouraged her from seeking answers, while her mother’s submissive behavior offered no support.

In a fleeting moment of her father’s distraction, she inadvertently overheard him whispering to one of his assistants. To her astonishment, she discovered the shocking truth: her father had ordered the killing of her fiancé, believing he had betrayed him. The weight of betrayal burdened her thoughts, as she grappled with the acceptance of being widowed even before her wedding took place. The belongings she had carefully packed during the engagement period now seemed futile, as her dreams of a new life were shattered before her.

Fueled by anger, she summoned the courage to break free from the clutches of the black market’s interests. Seeking solace and support, she reached out to her fiancé’s brother, and together they devised a plan for revenge. Determined and resolute, they embarked on a mission to expose the facade of false family honor that thrived on the suffering of others.

She found herself an “outsider” within her own family, while her brother-in-law suffered imprisonment due to her father’s immense influence and power. An entire year passed, yet her father’s burning rage and desire to end her life remained unyielding. Her story became buried beneath the weight of history, overshadowed by futile attempts at *Atwas*<sup>7</sup> that were offered. Her father’s involvement in the black market trade entangled various individuals and subcontractors, all seeking

---

7. *Atwa* (translator note): A term that entails a formal gathering of tribal leaders/family men to informally resolve a huge conflict such as murder, rape, or divorce. It is the tribal way of hosting a few family and extended family members/friends over coffee to settle the dispute by setting out-of-court “settlements” led by tribal men/elders to make peace; *Atwas* don’t always have positive results or resolve the conflict.

assurances of triumph through tribal rituals and a distorted concept of masculinity. Upon her return home, she was subjected to strict conditions, banished to an isolated corner of the house, cut off from family interactions, forbidden from dining at the family table, and excluded from participating in family rituals. Her life continued to be tightly controlled by her domineering father, who dictated the course of her existence. She had no choice but to patiently await his selection of a husband from within his circle, disregarding her own wishes and opinions.

---

### The Fourteenth Story

---

She was a highly educated young woman from a socially influential family. She lost her father, a prosperous merchant, during her second year of university. With two wives residing in the same grand residence, her father's strict and domineering personality shaped a life centered around financial power. As the youngest member of a large family, with numerous siblings and uncles, she had always relied on her father as her guardian. His absence left her feeling vulnerable and uncertain about what the future held for her and her family. She understood that the comfort often associated with a substantial inheritance did not guarantee long-term financial stability. Despite these challenges, she successfully completed her studies, and her two brothers took over their father's business, providing for her university fees, monthly allowance, and household expenses. The details of the inheritance were never openly discussed or mentioned. While her siblings married, she remained with her mother

and stepmother, caring for them. Later, she secured a good job and excelled in her role. She remained dedicated to her family, making it a point to return home every day.

Her brothers had a strict set of requirements for potential suitors. Whenever a prospective groom emerged, complications would mysteriously arise, leading to their sudden disappearance. She understood that these criteria were rooted in concerns over inheritance and maintaining control. Her share of the estate remained undistributed, and in their eyes, she, her mother, and stepmother were destined to be left with nothing. They believed that everything rightfully belonged to them, disregarding the need for equal division. It seemed as though tribalism and ignorance surrounding inheritance laws did not disappear, but rather continued to linger in modern society.

As the woman approached her 40s, her brothers discovered that their mother had given up her share of the family estate and sold her inherited belongings. This revelation unleashed their hidden malevolence and led to threats. Adding to the complexity, one of her married sisters unexpectedly sided with her brothers, reaching a financial agreement over her share of the inheritance. Despite relentless pressure from her brothers to relinquish her rightful ownership, the young woman remained determined to find a way to escape the situation, especially with the additional share from her mother. In desperation, she sought the protection of a powerful man with significant family power, whose influence was akin to that of a gang. He offered her protection in exchange for marriage, with the condition that she would be his second wife. The woman secretly welcomed the idea of marriage, yet chose not to reveal her true feelings.

When her two brothers became aware of the situation, their anger consumed them, leading to a violent confrontation at the husband's workplace. Fueled by rage, they stormed the husband's workplace, determined to take revenge on their sister, who was present with her husband. Tragically, mutual gunfire erupted, and one of her brothers was injured yet survived by using his sister's body as a shield. She lost her life in his arms, becoming a martyr in the battle over inheritance. She left behind her husband as the heir to a quarter of the estate.

---

### The Fifteenth Story

---

The decision made by her father to marry her off as a minor, below the legal age of marriage, and in defiance of the law was not only illegal but also deeply concerning. He arranged for his daughter to marry a man of similar age to him, under the guise of "protecting her." However, it became evident that the new husband had ulterior motives, as his eyes revealed a lustful desire, indicating a history of exploiting young women.

This so-called "marriage" not only brought to light the hidden truth but also flagrantly violated the law. She found herself face-to-face with her father, who, despite his initial failure to exploit her for financial gain, allowed his insatiable greed to cloud his judgment. His self-serving desires, cunningly masked as a "sutrah,"<sup>8</sup> did not deter him from subjecting her to this perilous path once again.

---

8. Translator's note: Sutrah (literal Arabic meaning: a cover/jacket) is a concept presented that a marriage is an overall cover for a woman's honor and actions by committing to a man; it stems from lore and culture—not religious practice—that a woman is only accepted and whole in marriage.

As I immersed myself in this case, the vivid images that lingered in my thoughts became increasingly impossible to disregard.

Do men derive pleasure from showing off in front of young girls who have not known anyone before them, in order to impress them?

How can these young girls, who have only experienced the innocence of childhood in a game of hopscotch, comprehend the nature of marriage and the responsibilities that come with it? How do I tell them about what lies ahead?

This father, who persisted in his efforts to marry off his daughter, made another attempt, using a customary oral agreement, and claiming to follow the laws of Islam to justify his actions. The girl left for the 1948 occupied areas to face her destiny, her childhood stolen from her. A few months went by and she came back pregnant, finding only a mentally unstable mother facing dire living conditions. She was later placed in a shelter along with other women with similar stories to hers. This story happened during the end of the Second Intifada, a tumultuous period for the whole country. Some of the residents of this house were warlords; some possessed understanding of the circumstances and how to navigate them, while others remained oblivious or chose to ignore what needed to be done. Regardless of their individual differences, they shared a commonality in their ultimate outcome.

She was not yet 16 years old and yet she was going into labor at the shelter, isolated and under constant surveillance. No one believed her claims of being married, leaving everyone puzzled, questioning who she had been with and what had transpired. She became the subject of discussions and gossip among everyone,



yet no one bothered to talk to her. There was a lack of empathy and understanding regarding her emotions and inner struggles. Her fears, clearly reflected in her eyes, were dismissed and overlooked, without any consideration for how she might have been feeling.

A child is born into the world, unaware that his mother is unjustly labeled as "the mother of an illegitimate child" in official records. On the child's birth certificate, the father's name is filled with a fictitious one, emphasizing his status as an illegitimate child. The mother's eyes were weary from exhaustion as she whispered incessantly about her desire to see her child. They managed to convince her not to see her child by suggesting that it could lead to emotional attachment. They who oversaw the birth rejected the girl's plea to see her baby, and told her to leave the place knowing that she would not be recognized by the baby and would soon forget this ever happened. The situation was marked by a high degree of tension and unwavering solidity. The girl was subject to questioning despite them knowing that she was unable to provide answers or a viable solution to the issue. The girl's response was an emphatic scream stating firmly that she was married. Counter questions:

To whom?

What's his name?

Where does he live?

Bring him over if you can.

"I ran away," she said. The mere thought of him returning filled her with terror.

As the years passed, new potential suitors came forth to ask for her hand in marriage. By her early 20s, an unwavering desire

to find her beloved son consumed her. His absence had left a profound void in her heart. She approached me with a sense of urgency; her emotions were running high, and it was clear that her heart was racing faster than her lips could form coherent sentences. "I tried to paint a picture of my newborn, but I failed because they didn't let me see him. Please help me!" she pleaded, her voice heavy with emotion. Motherhood had captivated her mind and the injustice of the situation weighed heavily on her heart. She feared that the scales of justice might falter, leaving her soul in turmoil. She longed for just a glimpse of her child, even if only for a moment, but her circumstances were complicated and she was unable to be a full-time mother. "I can't be where he is," she confided, "I only want to see him."

Trapped within her material and social reality, she remained trapped by circumstances. Despite her desire to care for the child, they were arranging to marry her off to a man. It felt as if she was draped in a torn jacket throughout the frigid year, battling the bitter cold that pierced through her very being, forced into a marriage she never desired, the man she wed became the tattered garment she wore, promising warmth but offering none. This is what sutrah was in its perverted concept.

Our legal journey began: a tumultuous path marked by contracts that were not settled properly and divorces that did not comply with the legal principles. After a year of diligent collective legal efforts, her moment finally arrived. The court helped her bear a document that proved, six years later, that she was not an adulteress, nor was her child the son of a vice. The ruling was

a small victory, but it could not retroactively remove the stigma that had been cast upon her, nor could it reunite her with her child.

With careful sensitivity, I searched for the whereabouts of this child. Where could he be?

To my great surprise, it was the very same child whose foster mother had pleaded with me in my office merely months before his biological mother had come to me. A written request had been left on my desk, urging me to change the child's name to match that of his foster family, with the intention of shielding him from the social stigma and disgrace that had haunted his past. Sickened souls had cruelly labeled the innocent baby as an "illegitimate child," maliciously discussing the consequences of adult sins without fully grasping the details. She went on to explain the details of the crime and the reprehensible act committed by the father, husband, and those responsible for overseeing the tragic birth, weaving tales of darkness.

My retrospective moments when I made the link between these two women still give me goosebumps. I observed the transformation of the "illegitimate child" into the "beloved and accepted child." I also witnessed the childless foster mother tremble from the thought of the loss of her child, a gift bestowed upon her after long deprivation.

His mother persisted in her plea to catch a glimpse of him, without revealing her true identity. Eventually, she negotiated

with herself, settling for the opportunity to just see a picture of him. Then she disappeared, perhaps seeking solace in her new journey with her new husband, hoping that he would provide her with the impossible relief she yearned for.

They never met!

I cannot predict the future and the new events it may hold, or how the story will unfold in the years to come. However, the divine justice of Almighty God, demonstrated through the mother's appearance for a year to rectify the child's status to a legitimate son, serves as a powerful reminder that God, in His wisdom, grants respite for a time and does not neglect His powers.

---

## The Sixteenth Story

---

A rural university girl, adorned with a pristine image, pure of thought, and chastity preceding her physical body: This is an image that serves as nourishment for our minds and offers warm hospitality to strangers. It disregards the underlying subtext and all the faults and sins that surround humanity. The phrase "Oh my God" finds its most accurate place when confronted with the forbidden, highlighting the existence of the perceived angelic intellectual structure.

Within the context of the same picture, rural mothers are cautious in raising their daughters, sometimes to the point of secrecy, driven by a deep desire to uphold values and maintain prudence in matters concerning unfamiliar men and relatives. In this setting, religion intertwines with tradition, and social intermarriage reaches a point of integration, blurring the distinct characteristics of each individual reality.

When should we come to the realization that "being moral" does not overstep the boundaries set by religious and social agreements? And when do we determine the moment for when religion and social customs can merge correctly?

Our upbringing, which often portrayed men as the dreaded "boogeyman" who will steal our virginity, prevented many from breaking free from the cocoon of fear and ignorance when entering into marriage. We were not adequately taught about the permissible and lawful ways to express our desires, beyond what

our female relatives imparted on us. Our mothers and aunts emphasized the virtues of purity. As a result, many of us grapple with understanding an alternative discourse—one that grants us the freedom to wholeheartedly surrender our hearts and bodies to our partners.

Back to our rural university girl, whose innocent thoughts were enticed by a doctor into a customary marriage. She transitioned from dreams brimming with roses to facing the reality of her hastily embraced motherhood within this relationship. He showed no shame in confronting his own manipulative actions, how he persuaded her, and instilled fear in the relationship, which broke her innocence. He left her to stand up for herself, and to wonder how her spirituality, physicality, and her dreams were unleashed without doubt of the future.

How did our girl, deeply immersed in the conservative rural mindset, recall the image of the family and its uncertain destiny after trauma? Eventually, she ended up abandoned and rejected, finding herself placed in a protective shelter that she had previously only heard stories about from other women. Today, she became one of them, experiencing firsthand what she had once observed from a distance, whether through glimpses of the building or via news reports.

The woman who risked everything and sacrificed her public image, embarking on a forbidden path for the sake of their love, suddenly found herself facing him and her own family in a situation that resembled scenes from a dramatic TV show. As

she stood in the courtroom, her mother's astonishment burst forth, uttering, "I raised you with dreams of giving you away as a bride." Our young woman stood under the watchful gaze of the authorities, facing both those who loved her and the one she had fearlessly embarked on this journey with. Confronting the men who guarded the honor of the family, she knew they would mourn a daughter they had lost while she was still alive. How would they explain going back home without her? Returning without praising their "tougher-than-men daughter?"

A husband—a customary marriage—and a father-in-law are both intransigent, accusing her of vice—as if there is no vice for men! She should have been in control of her own body, preserving her virginity throughout her life, not surrendering it to him in a moment of vulnerability. Her husband erupted like a hurricane, unleashing chaos and scattering memories in public: She was not a virgin, and perhaps she had been with other men before me! Her mother continued crying, weeping and longing for the traditional white wedding that symbolizes purity. We proceeded with the legal documentation of the marriage, granting her rights and protection for the future. After the reality of family abandonment settled, we advised her not to return to the house. Her story was soon followed by divorce and an orphan birth, as there were no women in the family to provide guidance or share in the joys of motherhood. There were no women to provide support and guidance during the cravings and desires of pregnancy, no one to share the joyful moments or help in preparing for the birth, whether it be for winter or summer clothes. She only wished for the due date not to come, yet the

birth inevitably came. She faced an ominous labor—one without the customary celebrations and traditions such as the distribution of sweets and the slaughter of Aqeeqa<sup>9</sup>.

But the future came quickly, as if it had devoured a part of her present. The Creator, in His wisdom, relieved her solitude by taking her infant to Himself, leaving her to return alone, just as she had left her father's house.

She carries with her a silent and untold story, one that remains unspoken and unaddressed. Now, what lies ahead is a new beginning, but what it will look like remains uncertain to me. I cannot fathom how she will navigate towards a future that is secure and peaceful, considering all that has been, and still lingers—and lingers.

---

9. Aqeeqa: a traditional Islamic ceremony that is performed to celebrate the birth of a child. It involves the sacrifice of an animal, usually a sheep or a goat, on the seventh day after the child is born. The Aqeeqa ceremony is usually performed by the parents or guardians of the child and is considered an important act of thanksgiving and gratitude to Allah for the safe delivery of the child. It is also believed to be a way of protecting the child from harm and evil.

---

## The Seventeenth Story

---

The day that this woman entered the world 40 years ago was marked by ill fortune: the birth of girls in rural areas did not always evoke joy! The phrase "Praise be to God" was uttered in an emotionally perplexing context, a poignant expression of gratitude in the face of adversity that becomes even more profound when one is born with disabilities. One can envision the family's concealed apprehension for her future, hindering the potential for remarkable resilience that God may bestow upon individuals like her.

Years ago, she sought my counsel as I was the sole female judge in her area. With unwavering determination, she approached me, despite her unsteady steps.

"Listen to me as a mother and a woman," she declared, devoid of any fear of potential backlash.

Her voice remained resolute, her eyes radiating strength. I wondered how one's eyes could convey strength without betraying vulnerability. It was through her words that I discovered the answers I sought. Why do I perceive beauty and strength concealed within the surface details? I observed her actively participating in legal proceedings, advocating alongside my male colleague in public hearings, seeking guidance. Swiftly, I endeavored to comprehend the purpose of her visit, her request, and the trust she placed in my judgment, despite our lack of

personal or judicial history. I sensed the potential consequences if I allowed her to depart without truly lending her my ear.

She passionately shared her educational and professional achievements, refusing to be labeled as dependent. Above all, she treasured the precious gift of motherhood, considering it a blessing from God. This gift has fortified her determination, dispelling any doubts about the future of individuals with disabilities. Her husband expressed a desire to rely on her financially, and she was well aware of his intentions. When they first met, she held a respectable job with a good income. Though he tried to mask his motives, she had already contemplated starting a family. Her longing for motherhood, despite her disability, led her to pray to God for this blessing. She acknowledged that her desire may have overshadowed his questionable intentions.

She eloquently discussed her children and how her resilient body adapted to serve both herself and her family. She shared with me the tireless care she provided for them, without any assistance, emphasizing the strength of her dedication in meeting their needs today and in planning for their future. Unexpectedly, she opened up about her fears, expressing them with remarkable clarity, catching me off guard.

A profound silence enveloped the room as I listened to the harrowing details of her case. Insults, leaving her vulnerable, mocking her disability when he was intoxicated, subjecting her to physical and emotional abuse. That was the crux of the matter. She did not falter when she declared,

"I want my daughters to be secure in the future. I want to ensure

a better tomorrow for them. If I share my story, I may win, but my daughters will suffer the consequences.” She added gently. “I will achieve victory for myself today, but it will undoubtedly cost them their future, and society will forget my suffering. They will only remember that their father gambled with his family’s well-being. Our society will pardon my husband for choosing a disabled wife who couldn’t fulfill his desires in his youth, and the stigma will haunt my daughters. This is not my intention; it undermines everything I planned for their future. I seek advice, a way out. What are your thoughts?” She asked.

I sat in awe-struck silence as she poured out her fears, vividly describing the haunting image of her children waking up to witness the torment of the night with their drunkard father. The realization that she had been lying to them, concealing the two faces of their father, pierced her heart. Her words resonate deeply within me, as I found myself in a realm far removed from the trivial disputes of everyday life.

As she concluded her heartfelt speech, uninterrupted and without argument, I found myself in a situation I never anticipated. In my daily interactions with my colleagues, I am often confronted by the tempestuous disputes of the able-bodied people over trivial matters of little consequence. However, in that moment of stillness, as I listened to her words, a flood of wisdom enveloped me, offering a perspective far beyond the mundane.

It was in that instant that I realized I had never envisioned myself outside the realm of the judiciary, working in parallel lines to

combat injustice and safeguard a brighter future for her children. I sketched a map of advice for her. First and foremost, I assured her that she was not alone, encouraging her to maintain a rational mindset for herself and her precious children. Additionally, we contemplated strategies to thwart her husband’s malevolence or unearth his dormant goodness. And if all else failed, we devised ways to shield her from the fear of his potential retaliation, ensuring that she remained broken.

In a short span of time, she discovered her balance, employing a touch of wickedness when necessary to deter his malevolence. Each passing day, the lunar cycle in her life unveiled a fresh harvest, as her children remained shielded from the clutches of stigma and shame. Her steadfast faith in God, followed by an unwavering belief in herself, transmuted her perceived disability into a wellspring of beauty, evoking not just compassion, but admiration from all who crossed her path.

This revelation reshaped my understanding, for it is evident that human behavior cannot be governed by rigid rules alone. Instead, it beckons us to seek unconventional and creative approaches to navigate the myriad of expectations that permeate our personal and professional lives. It highlights the significance of embracing the nuances and complexities of the gray areas, where profound insights and solutions often reside.

---

## The Eighteenth Story

---

The immigration of her family to the United States brought forth a new opportunity for individuals seeking marriage: a pathway to align immigration statuses or to remain overseas if already residing as migrants. For those longing to return to their home country, this desire may disrupt the established program of fundraising or altering the current circumstances.

Families within the diaspora exhibit a keen eagerness to expedite the marriages of their sons and daughters in Palestine, fearing the possibility of being indefinitely caught in the diaspora without the opportunity to return -a diaspora within a diaspora, if you will. This becomes a means to entice new individuals into the diaspora without thoroughly evaluating the suitability of the prospective family member.

Our heroine, a young woman who had recently completed high school, harbored aspirations of pursuing a career as a nurse. However, her family's insistence on her return from America and immediate marriage overshadowed her dreams for a promising future. This prompted me to contemplate how these families perceive the delicate balance of social benefit, weighing the desires of those seeking advantageous unions against the inclination to rely on their daughters for a stable future. How do they perceive and define strength in such circumstances?

The wedding ceremony served as a momentous occasion, uniting two previously unfamiliar families in a celebration filled with joy, delectable sweets, and mutual admiration. These strange human interactions unexpectedly stirred warm emotions, inexperienced in similar situations.

Following the wedding, the bride was praised for her good fortune, while the groom faced the surprising realization of his limited understanding of the legal intricacies of the immigration process. This revelation was further compounded by the Israeli security forces' refusal to grant him a visa, hindering his aspirations to travel to America.

Undeterred in his desire to emigrate, the groom readily committed himself to the substantial dowry, leaving no room for hesitation. However, when the American dream disappeared, the groom callously abandoned his pregnant wife, leaving her to face the challenges of impending motherhood alone. Remarkably, her family remained oblivious to her condition, entrusting her well-being to her newly acquired "protector" as they returned to America. I was very surprised to witness how mothers and families relinquish their responsibilities to a newly wedded groom, without conducting any follow-up or verification. The woman, burdened with societal pressure, was coerced into carrying on with her daily life, while being deprived of her rightful financial entitlements outlined in the marriage contract. In contrast, the man, who failed to fulfill his promises of improving their financial and social reality in America, faced no consequences or obligations to rectify the situation.

The groom's blatant disregard for his pregnant wife, openly declaring his intention to marry another, showcased his indifference towards her well-being. Her solitude during pregnancy only amplified his apathy. Within a year, her mother returned without the other male members of the family who were occupied in America. Her mother, compelled to share the intricate details of her daughter's story with anyone willing to listen, recounted the story publicly and privately.

Accompanied by her mother, the bride approached me, with her mother speaking on her behalf. The bride herself could only utter a few words, appearing shattered with no hope of restoration. There was no connection with the child her mother had carried, leaving me speechless. It was evident that she rejected her own child, a painful reminder of someone she desperately wished to forget.

Through a tumultuous legal battle, my determination to bring an end to the conflict intensified with each passing moment. It became apparent that the bride was evading the judgments of those around her. Then, her moment of triumph arrived, as the roles reversed dramatically. Her voice resounded powerfully as she fought for her child's rights against her ex-husband, after she was in denial of the situation.

How can shattered glass mend and fuse together so resolutely? After her divorce at the tender age of 19, she rose above it all. The transformation from before and after was incomprehensible; it left me stunned. I refrained from interrupting, wanting to revel

in the beauty that God has bestowed upon us, witnessing the mystery of her healing and brokenness transforming into victory.

When I took off my judicial robes, I offered her the opportunity to pursue her dream of nursing, and without hesitation, she embraced the promise of a brighter future. Doing everything in my power, I encouraged her to embark on this educational path, and the journey of transformation began with great success. Some time later, she paid me a visit, like all the litigants who come and go once their cases are resolved. To my surprise, she presented me with a thoughtful gift after the birth of my daughter, reflecting her new circumstances. We engaged in a light-hearted conversation, devoid of the formalities of a judge and a litigant. However, the story did not conclude there. Like many who were born and raised in America, she returned, seeking fresh opportunities and pursuing education. She managed to reach a custody settlement with her ex-husband, establishing joint custody for their child. It was unfortunate that their poor child had to witness the animosity between them following their breakup. Nevertheless, she may have learned the importance of personal space and setting boundaries in giving to others.

Will our heroine continue to follow the traditional migration pattern, like many before her? Will she provide her child with the advantages of immigration, exercising caution?

For me, the story concluded with this young woman, our heroine. However, the passage of time brought the mother back to me, embarking on a judicial journey with her second daughter, and another groom.



---

## The Nineteenth Story

---

As I watched a charity program on TV, I was captivated by the image of a woman and her adolescent child. Their faces drew me in, compelling me to listen attentively. I watched in silence as she made a heartfelt plea for kindness and assistance for herself and her adopted child. The anger and sadness overwhelmed me as I recalled how we, as judges, mentors, and members of the committee that facilitated the adoption, had believed that his new reality would provide him with a better life. We had envisioned him being welcomed into a loving foster family. The committee had worked tirelessly to ensure that he was no longer considered as an illegitimate child but was legally "adopted" in every sense. To see him in a state of destitution on television, portrayed as part of the hardships faced by his foster mother, weighed heavily on my judicial conscience and my sense of motherhood.

A year prior to this, a 50-year-old woman approached me seeking assistance in re-issuing documents from an adoption file following the passing of her husband, who had been the custodial father. She had encountered legal challenges, particularly from her husband's family. Accompanied by a man in his thirties, whom she had married, she came to me with her child sitting nearby, engrossed in an electronic device to keep him occupied.

I must admit, the scene gave me pause. The woman's visible physical limitations and the noticeable age difference between her and her new husband caught my attention. However, I redirected

my focus to the necessary paperwork and the importance of reorganizing the child's file and his life.

Returning to the present scene, I tried to imagine how the child must have navigated the complexities of a family dynamic where his mother was unwell and his father had passed away. Were there disputes over inheritance with the father's family, who might contest the child's legitimacy and thus his entitlement to inheritance? The child's sole connection to that family had been severed with his father's death.

I attempted to envision the child's interaction with his new foster father, particularly his response when the mother requested to grant her husband the status of the new custodian. I politely interrupted and suggested that the little one find enjoyment in another room, hoping to minimize my observations of their interactions.

The public discourse surrounding her age and health made me wonder if the child was being utilized as a crutch. How did we overlook these crucial details during the adoption process? I endeavored to evaluate the potential next steps and the actions that needed to be considered.

The somber expressions on the faces of the committee members, the moments of silent contemplation: What should we do? Should we summon the mother? Is it possible to reclaim the child from her? Thoughts and deliberations raced through our minds in a tumultuous manner. Ultimately, we couldn't deny the undeniable truth: She was his mother.

The haunting of bad dreams envelops me whenever I recollect the circumstances in which he came of age, surrounded by thorns. What kind of upbringing did he endure? What experiences and memories were etched in his mind? Did he find stability and contentment? How did we yearn for him to flourish when we entrusted him to the care of an alternative family, believing it to be in his best interest. What remains hopeful amidst the darkness? Was he unhappy? Did he shed tears without anyone's knowledge? Was he burdened by the realization of being an illegitimate child and the responsibility he carried towards his foster mother?

A whirlwind of thoughts engulfed me, and I found myself unable to quell them. I must rely on the Almighty God and await the passage of time to bring me news, for we may find ourselves caught in the middle, with only God as our guide.

This is one of those stories with uncertain endings, the stories with conclusions unknown, known only to God. I must surrender to reliance, yet I am filled with anguish. Do rivers truly run dry? Does it signify failure when we find ourselves stagnant? Or does it suggest that sometimes stillness is necessary?

---

## The Twentieth Story

---

It may be difficult to fathom that in Palestine, there are individuals living on the outskirts of major cities who lack proper identity documentation. Five, six or seven sisters, old and young, navigate their way through life without the necessary papers, sharing only one birth certificate. Several husbands for one woman (on paper) but only one in reality. Their existence lacks legal recognition, and mothers are unable to register the births of their children, as they cannot fill in the mother's tab in the birth certificate, thus leaving some children forgotten when it comes to inheritance. Ambitions and hopes for oneself and children are based on money, education, and everything that is usually part of the cycles of blessings. Yet, amidst this richly colored fabric, we often overlook the struggles of those for whom the simple act of proving their own existence is a formidable challenge. They are forced to rely on the fragile currents of emotion in order to persuade others of their reality, struggling to find stability in a world where tangible evidence is the accepted currency of truth. Such seekers may wander through life like nomads, their travels driven by an unshakeable need to discover a sense of direction, a compass that will guide them towards the elusive solution they seek.

They are the lost ones, drifting aimlessly through life without a compass to guide them. Their prayers and dreams are consumed by the desperate need to prove their very existence, as if grasping for something intangible that forever eludes their grasp. With

wearied arms, they wave frantically to those who pass them by, hoping against hope that someone will take notice and offer a guiding hand.

She approaches and says “I am the one who goes by a certain name. I grew up, moved, got married and gave birth all under the same name as my five sisters. My father was content with registering only my older sister's birth, and then subsequent babies were born without the customary registration process. We were unaware of the situation as little girls until we grew up and got married, one after the other, using the same birth certificate.” At first glance, it may appear that we are faced with a straightforward case of polygamy with a single, definitive truth. Yet there is more than meets the eye here. Legally, polyandry does not disrupt marriage. It is the excuse of “God’s will and grace,” an excuse to slack on legal work that sets the tone to our story.

I often encounter adherence to religion and prayer as a shield for misguided beliefs. It makes me wonder how it is possible to contemplate the response without reasoning. Take Mary, peace be upon her, for example. She was chosen over all the women in the world, despite her frail body when she gave birth to Christ, she shook the trunk of the palm tree<sup>10</sup> to get dates—not out of

---

10. Translator’s note: In the Holy Quran, the story of Christ’s birth is different than in the Bible. Much similar in the beginning of the story, yet the ending is different. Mary was instructed to withdraw from her people and to take a vow of silence (they disbelieved that the baby was a miracle) in order to avoid suspicion and accusations. She obeyed, and retreated to a distant place, where she gave birth to Jesus under a palm tree. Jesus then broke the vow of silence after Mary’s return to her people to defend her innocence.

ascertaining her physical ability nor out of the inability of God Almighty to provide—but to be a lesson to the public of the importance of understanding reasonings.

Now, returning to our heroine, she speaks hastily, with numerous details intertwined in her stories. Her uninterrupted expression yearns for a listening ear that longs to hold an identification paper. She wants to scream and say I am...I am a...and I also am...I’m married to...I am the mother of...and...and...She continues, shocking us with the revelation that her six children lack birth certificates and bear the burden of denial.

I felt the triumph of chaos after hearing her: not knowing who the husband’s wife is, nor who is the mother of the son! It was easier to reject her case with all her chaos, but the glimmer of hope rising from her bound me. She appealed to the human being in me, to my motherhood: to experiencing the first school moments with the children she desired. She appealed to my anxiety with an unexpected sickness of a child. She reminded me that I was able to claim health insurance while she was not. How can we stand and face God if we do not yield with all our mental, legal and functional influence to make efforts to change lives? Where are we in the process of mitigating social ignorance and female denial hiding in the details?

Our heroine and six children, both male and female, were without records! We gathered as teams, utilizing our legal and functional strengths, to obtain two legal birth certificates for her and her eldest daughter. For the remaining children, we issued individual

Palestinian birth certificates despite the absence of supporting documentation. These children and adults had been deprived of a genuine existence, as the Israeli side played a crucial role in this legal solution. Our Palestinian human existence is at the mercy of the Israeli authorities, who only grant rights based on faith or deceit. The latter option is weaker, especially after the legal dissolution of the marriages of the sisters, who were registered as married to one husband with several marriage contracts!

It was heart-breaking to see the flow of tears as she held her birth certificate for the first time ever! Even more difficult was the speechlessness with overwhelming emotion. These are the moments that leave you to pause and re-examine the definitions of the word denial—the meaning of being used in your life when you rest habitually, where there is comfort in moving, traveling and receiving medical treatment, a real meaning of praise when blessings are within reach.

I did not know how she continued her journey with the forgotten rest. This story resonated with me, as it taught me that there are countless individuals who remain forgotten and denied existence, despite living in close proximity to all of us!

In the past, Sufi had said, “The intensity of closeness is a veil against the light.”

---

## The Twenty First Story

---

The old Sharia rule, “The child is the bed’s and for the fornicator is the stone,” holds significant weight in Sharia law when determining parentage. This principle is well-known among legal professionals. When I first heard it, I was intrigued, wondering if it concealed a hidden message.

In the case of a married woman who was also a mother, entering into a new relationship and engaging in intimate encounters while still married, it was rather challenging to find a positive way to describe her actions. Society often labels her as an adulteress and betrayer, accusing her of disregarding the sanctity of her marriage. What struck me was the conspicuous absence of any mention of her husband. How was he treating her? Did she voice any complaints? Did she seek assistance or attempt to reconcile? Was she compelled to continue cohabitating with him despite her emotional decline, and the painful aspect of raising children under such circumstances? Let me clarify, I do not justify any wrongdoing by using the term ‘sin.’ Betrayal has no justification as a principle or virtue, regardless of whether it was committed by the woman or the other party involved, be it an angelic, satanic or anything in between. Motives differ in each unique situation.

One fateful day, this woman stumbled upon the revelation that her children had undergone a DNA test at the behest of their father. Overwhelmed by fear, she retreated into seclusion, fearing for her very life. I wondered if these trying moments could serve

as a sufficient impetus for seeking forgiveness or if they merely marked the initial steps towards that elusive path.

In a proactive measure, she sought refuge with her child, fully aware of the possibility that he might not pass the paternity test. The child unwittingly fell into this trap: he was indeed her son, but his “official father” was no longer his true father. How did his biological siblings accept him, as he transitioned from being a brother to a denied half-brother? Did they envision a new home for him, alongside their mother? What did this hypothetical abode look like? How did they imagine their mother, embellishing the story with additional details and nuances? A simmering rage, predetermined and unspoken, prevented the children from asking about their mother. How do adults control the interactions between young ones and their parents? How do they exploit them in moments of retaliation?

It is a peculiar and disconcerting phenomenon how swiftly we, as human beings, can shift from the sphere of love, passion, and longing to the sphere of hatred, using others as instruments of malevolence, ruthlessly trampling upon the cherished moments of our abode until they are reduced to mere fragments. Memories scatter in the wind, transforming into ephemeral dust.

The husband’s illicit examination revealed that he was genetically the father of two out of three children. However, this examination violated the law by forcefully denying the lineage of the third child. The husband, though he had heard the phrase “a child is for

his parent’s bed (a result of their intercourse<sup>11</sup>),” failed to grasp its true meaning and understand its significance. Overwhelmed by confusion and a blow to his manhood, he sought to write off the little child and move on, hoping to wake up from his nightmarish reality. In his desperation, he lost his way and the reassurance he once had, ultimately ending the lives of both his wife and their child, believing that this sin would be eradicated. The lingering question remains: has the sin extended its reach to the remaining children, or has it been confined to the tragic fate of their mother and brother?

The absence of a spiritual mentor during one’s formative years, coupled with a life solely focused on material pursuits, can complicate our ability to navigate challenging situations. Without the nourishment of spiritual growth, we may find it difficult to remain patient and open-minded as we search for solutions and strive to move forward. It is as if we are wearing blinders, unable to see the broader perspective.

---

11. Translator’s note: i.e. the lineage is a result of the intercourse, irrespective of a marriage contract or in this case adultery. Proof of lineage is by the identity of the parent, irrespective of the nature of the relationship.

---

## Conclusion

---

I am delighted to conclude "Similar Stories, Wives; the H of Heaven in Hell, a collection of stories written by my colleague, Judge Somoud Damiri." This book sheds light on the social injustices faced by women in our Palestinian society, injustices that stem from a marriage of three factors: occupation, legal shortcomings, and negative customs and heritage. This book serves as a valuable resource for anyone seeking insight into the pluralistic and complex legal system and its impact on Palestinian affairs.

The support for the publication of this book comes as part of extensive efforts and activities undertaken within the Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability: (YW4A) program. It is implemented by the Gender Justice Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, in cooperation with the Faith to Action Network, which is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands. The main objective of this project is to defend the universal human rights of young women, ensuring their dignity and physical integrity, and promoting their equal participation in decision-making processes. To achieve this goal, we aim to challenge negative social norms and practices, particularly within religious institutions and organizations, where the rights of young women in Palestine are often more restricted than in other public spaces. The project

aims to engage with religious leaders to bring about change, neutralize negative norms, foster positive attitudes towards the rights of young women, and encourage positive practices among men by promoting a culture of positive masculinity that upholds a natural balance and ensures the safety of young women, while actively listening to their voices.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land is a local Arab church operating in Palestine and Jordan. It stands as the only religious institution in Palestine that has integrated gender equality and women's rights into its personal status law. The Church's Gender Justice Ministry strives to challenge negative gender-based social norms and empower women and girls in society by developing research and implementing events aimed at addressing the root causes of institutional and social discrimination against women. The Church focuses particularly on addressing legal gaps that perpetuate gender inequality.

Within the framework of the Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy and Accountability: (YW4A) program, Judge Somoud Damiri and her colleague, Judge Scarlet Bishara, established Al-Hakimat Council, a Palestinian feminist initiative that adopts the principle of citizenship as a tool for legislative development. The Council aims to strengthen the Palestinian identity and translate women's interests into actionable policies. Recognizing the significance of this initiative, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land has endorsed Al-Hakimat Council as part of its commitment to promoting justice and equality for all.

Al-Hakimat Council firmly believes that faith-based organizations in Palestine have a crucial role in advocating and reforming gender-discriminatory laws that undermine women's rights and gender equality. To achieve this goal, it is imperative to gather evidence that strengthens and institutionalizes advocacy procedures aimed at addressing and reforming laws that perpetuate gender discrimination in Palestine.

"Similar Stories, Wives: the H of Heaven in Hell" is a highly valuable contribution to ongoing efforts to challenge and confront negative behaviors associated with social norms that hinder the realization and adoption of justice, equity, and women's access to their rights. I hope that this book will deepen our understanding of the importance of attaining gender equality, justice, equity, and inclusion, and serve as an inspiration for taking action towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

**Ranan Issa Abu Shanab**  
**Gender Justice Program Manager**  
**The Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**in Jordan and the Holy Land**



**Somoud Damiri**

Somoud Damiri was the first female Sharia judge to head the Sharia Prosecution in the Palestinian Sharia Judiciary in 2010, the first female member of the Sharia Court of Appeal in Jerusalem, and the recipient of the Integrity and Transparency Award for the Public Sector from the AMAN Coalition for Integrity and Transparency in Palestine.

She holds a bachelor's degree in law from An-Najah University/Palestine, a master's degree in contemporary Islamic studies from Al-Quds University/Palestine, a diploma in legal skills from Birzeit University/Palestine; she is a PhD candidate specializing in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Göttingen/Germany, and a self-study theology student at the Bible College in Bethlehem/Palestine.

Somoud serves as a member of several national committees, including the Guardianship Committee and the National Referral System for Women Victims of Violence. She has also been a member of the Advisory Council of the Ministry of Women and the national team to discuss the initial report of the State of Palestine on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). From 2011 to 2018, she was a member of the Justice Sector Team in Palestine. In addition, she has published several research papers, including "The Palestinian Women's Legal Judicial Experience Between Sharia and Law" in both Arabic and English, which was published in the book "Uses of the Past" by Harrassowitz Verlag in 2018. She also contributed a research paper entitled "The Impact of Personal Status on the Interests of Individuals: The Palestine Case " to the book "International Law between Translation and Pluralism," published by Harrassowitz Verlag in 2022. Moreover, she wrote a research paper titled "Personal Status in Palestine Between Pluralism and International Commitments" through the Young Women's Project for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy, and Accountability with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in 2021.