

Mondays

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Monday is my favorite day of the week. Every Monday morning at 5:00 AM I wake up with a wide grin stretched across my face, and today is no different. Throwing my thin sheet to the side and I jump from my bed. I glide over to my baby brother's crib checking his diaper. "Good morning, Rafi. Are you hungry?" I ask him in what I assume is perfect English. Since I started learning English the opportunity to practice with anyone didn't exist. Now that the baby is two years old I use him as a practice tool while helping him be fluent in more than just Farsi; being bilingual will help him when he starts going to school.

Nodding his head excitedly and he says with his little voice "Yes, yes!" I smile at him as I grab him cradling him on my hip. He starts to wiggle and I let him walk freely through the door-frame. Refusing to waste any time I take the opportunity to walk toward my two drawer dresser and pull out my clean uniform, luckily madar went to the laundry station yesterday. I pull on the white pants and long sleeve black shirt loving the feel of the clean cloth on my skin. Grabbing the comb from my dresser, I run the broken piece of plastic through my waist length brown hair. "Lima!" I hear my maman yell from the sitting room, and in this compound, her voice vibrated the walls.

Rafi sits on top of my very pregnant and very frustrated mother. Since my father's death six months ago, maman has been sleeping on the sofa. "Feed your brother. I need rest," she says to me in Farsi. Quickly grabbing Rafi and I bring him to the kitchen that is separated by a half wall. I grab us both two pieces of naan, him a glass of milk and I brew myself a cup of tea. He rambles at the table as I prepare his breakfast occasionally putting in my word. Fourteen was the year my mother said I was to take over the house responsibilities, since she was pregnant with Rafi. She also explained that now that I was a woman these tasks were expected of me, but she

promised when she was no longer pregnant she would be an honorable wife. My chores have not once been ignored since that day.

I place the food on the table and before we eat I fold Rafi's hands in his lap. We say our morning prayer, carefully, not to disturb maman. During breakfast I try to make Rafi laugh as I speak in Farsi drowning out the sound of faint gunshots; it may be early morning but the harsh sound is still audible. After breakfast, I lay him to rest as he looks up at me with the same face of my late father. Tears form in my eyes, the day six months ago, feels like it was just this morning; I opened the door greeting those two men with news that an American had killed him. I will never forget the shriek my mother released.

I gather all my necessities into my handstitched sack and tie my black hijab around my hair; I always leave my face exposed on Mondays. I kiss my mother's head as I walk out the front door. The sun is just starting to rise as I begin the trek down the familiar route. Maman says I am brave for even leaving the house, the only time she grows the strength to leave is every Sunday to go to the laundry station. Horror stories of going outside are old news and I have even witnessed a few of my own. When I was twelve years old I experienced my best friend have acid viciously thrown onto her face, I have not seen her for almost four years. Mondays are not bravery, they are a priority.

I step onto the dusty rocks and kick a loose one far ahead of me. Passing my neighbors compounds, I see the same elderly man who sits outside of his home every sunrise; I do not wave at him because I know he uses this time for prayer. I reach the corner taking my usual turn but run into something completely unfamiliar.

A group of six white men dressed in camouflage were walking up the streets. In their hands, they each held heavy terrifying weapons. Their heavy boots kicked up thick clouds of

dust with each step they took; my stomach began to shake nervously and my breath begins to quicken. Taking a few deep breaths I feel my eyes slowly close, I count to ten before continuing my walk. My eyes remain on the ground, refusing to look at the dangerous guns. I count every step I take. Seven, eight, nine-

“HEY,” I hear behind me and I start to quicken my pace in a panic. “Young lady, hold on there!” I hear heavy footsteps approach me closer and I start to run. A heavy hand on my shoulder stops me and I cannot find the voice or the breath to scream. I wish I could scream at the top of my lungs. Maman was right, education is too dangerous.

“Don’t be scared, I am not going to hurt you.” An accent I do not recognize leaves the man’s voice. I feel the tears begin to leak out of my eyes. He turns me by the shoulders so I am facing him. His face is hard but his eyes are soft as he stated, “Please don’t cry. I just want to know where you are going.”

I stutter between sobs as I answer, “S-school, sir.”

He sighs heavily and turns back to his group of men waving them off. When he turns back to me a warm smile is on his face as he says “I would like to walk you to school today to ensure your safety.” I quickly shake my head and walk away from him. The white man killed my father, I do not trust them even for a walk to school. “If you’re not going to let me walk you to school I am just going to walk behind you until I know you are safe.”

“No thank you, sir, I do not need an escort today,” I say with a very shaky voice. I still hear his footsteps behind me.

After a few seconds of silence, he says “You know you speak better English than I do.” I feel a small grin crack at the corner of my lips. I still refuse to acknowledge his kindness. After a few more moments of awkward silence, I turn to him reluctantly, “I do not want to be rude, so

if you are ensuring my safety I will let you escort me today.” And the next thing I know the enemy is walking me to school.

During the seven-minute journey to my school, he was very curious and asked me all kinds of questions that I was happy to answer. I told him about my favorite subject, mathematics and how much I love all of my teachers and my plans to attend secondary school as soon as I was done with the primary. “I just wish I could go more often,” I admitted sadly as we approached the white building.

“How often do you go?” He inquired.

“Just Mondays.”

“Why is that?” he questions with a sad smile.

“Monday is the only day my older brother is not home.”

“Why can’t you go to school if your brother is home?” His eyes were patient waiting to for an answer. The only response I give is a shrug; I refuse to speak of my older brother.

Thanking him for his kindness I rush into the building. As I walk in to my classroom I say a silent prayer of gratitude for keeping me safe. Taking a seat at my desk and I feel myself relax fully; I grab my notebook from my bag and my pencil and begin writing notes, enjoying the comfort of the pencil dragging along the paper. Listening to my teacher’s smooth voice fill my head with knowledge awakes my mind; I am most calm when in the classroom.

Everything else fades away; I do not think about the soldier who risked his life for my safety today nor about my deceased father. There’s no thought about the damage happening to my home or Rafi’s safety growing up in this turmoil. I especially don’t think of my extremist brother throwing acid on my dear friends face outside of school because the vicious views he follows.

The only thing I care about is how I will solve the problem placed before me.