

Her Hands, My Shelter: A Mother's Quiet Rebellion

“La taqtae ealaqatak bi’ahad ‘afrad ‘usratik abdan, hataa law qatie ealaqatah bika.”

Do not ever sever your relationship with a member of your family, even if he severs his relationship with you.

Family. Often depicted as this warm, beautiful bond. Laughter filling the air, stories spanning generations, a place where an extra plate is set, and a hand is offered in need. Yet for some, family feels suffocating, like a thick fog, cold and silent. There's no warmth, just unspoken words and absent connections, leaving a wound that *never* heals.

My mother got married young, at the age of sixteen, bound by a promise that my father's family had made, “*You'll live in America soon!*”

News of her marriage spread through the small village of Hatim Gonj like wildfire. “Amar furi Americat jaibo!” *My daughter's going to America!* My grandmother proudly proclaimed to anyone who would listen, as if America, itself, were a shimmering prize that everyone could touch through the sheer force of belief.

Time has a way of wearing away at promises, and the first cracks began to show after the marriage when relatives would arrive unannounced, demanding a full table of food. “Get to work!” Dadi (my father's mother) would say cold-heartedly. She moved like a machine, going back and forth from the kitchen, carrying plates and hands trembling as she poured chai for relatives who never once asked how she was doing.

After the guests left, there was a stillness that settled over the house, my mother alone in the kitchen. She wiped down the counters and washed the loaded dishes. But her day would be far from over.

She would rush to sweep the floors, gather water from the well, and sort laundry. She washed the clothes gently by hand, her fingers turning red and cracking from the cold water, praying for the promise to be fulfilled soon.

Though, she was never too weary for my two siblings and me. She'd call us into the cramped bathroom, the steam from the hot water swirling around us. Her hands, though tired and calloused from all the housework, were always gentle with us.

She would walk us to school. A mile, each way. Her feet sore, back aching but she never complained. In the cold, her hands, tucked into the folds of her shawl, kept us close, guiding us, never letting us fall behind. At school, she'd pause for just a moment, kneeling down to give us a hug. "Pick you up right after school, okay?"

At night, when the house quieted down and the lights dimmed, she'd tuck us into bed with the softest of whispers. She'd pull the covers over us and kiss our foreheads. Her lullabies were so sweet, each note calming our minds, each word a comfort.

It wasn't until one crushing moment when everything changed.

I stood frozen, my heart pounding. My uncle's face was twisted in fury as he yelled at me, his voice loud and harsh. His belt, heavy with the weight of his anger, was raised high. The belt cracked, and I felt the burn of it across my back. My body jerked forward, the pain erupting across my skin.

Suddenly, I heard my mother.

Her voice cut through the sound of cracking, “*KHOBORDAR! Amar shontaror gayo hat divaina!*” *Don’t you DARE hit my child!*

He stared at her, disbelief flashing across his face, but she didn’t flinch. Her eyes were fixed on him, no longer afraid, no longer a meek woman standing in the corner. In that moment, seeing her stand tall and unwavering, I felt protected.

Then, she took my hands and walked out of the house. She packed what little we had, leaving behind the suffocating walls that had once been a prison. The house, the cruelty, the endless years of silence were gone forever.

Islam taught me to never sever relationships with family, to honor the bonds we are given. But my mother taught me something equally profound. There are times when obedience and silence aren’t virtues, when escaping is the only way to reclaim your own peace and freedom.