19th of November

**Oh *Allah*, where could she be?**

The hours since I’ve found her room empty feel like ages. I searched everywhere for her. From her favourite spot down the stream - where she always sits with HIM! - to her private lookout atop the hills looming over our humble *kolba*. If only she knew her mother’s old knees are still fit enough to scramble up to that pretty little spot of hers.

It’s long after dusk now and the cold stillness of the Afghan night has rushed me back inside. I can’t fall asleep, but what mother could? With every tick of that ancient clock a nerve racking image springs up. An image of my baby Mariam alone, abandoned on a mountain road seemingly deserted, but full of hidden dangers, with nothing but her childish green dress to protect her.

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Her dress! She changed into it before leaving. She’s not lost, she planned to run away! How could she do this? Does she not know she’s the only thing I really have? I bet Jalil is behind this. Who knows what that treacherous snake said to lure her? Filled her head with big dreams of a life in a stunning marble mansion and a spectacular cinema. But my little *harami* will never see any of it, the same way I didn’t.

It all should’ve been ours, mine and Mariam’s. I was supposed to be the queen of Herat, Jalil the King - my King - and Mariam our darling princess. And it would’ve been, had my dear lover not lost his spine. Unwilling to defy customs, he showed the door to his one true love. One true love carrying HIS baby.

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Tears of regret wash down my cheeks. What kind of a monster does Mariam see me as, if she chooses to chase down after HIM, a man who has done nothing for her? He will bring her nothing but disappointment and it will all be my fault!

I should’ve done a lot of things differently. I should’ve let her go to school, let her have the future she deserves. I should’ve not scared her with the stupid stories about *jhin.* I should’ve taught her how to spread her wings, rather than clipping them. I was horrified by the mere thought of her leaving our nest and now she fell right out of it. My little princess abandoned me and the king won’t save her. He won’t save me. I’ve lost my everything.

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The coldness of the night pierces my skin, but I don’t care anymore. On the horizon, the light of Herat create a shining dome above the city. My daughter is lost in it. A low crescent moon is hiding behind the dead tree in a distance. It has been dead for years, but only now I think it’s beautiful.

I gaze at the sky and a thousand stars stars gaze back. Jalil told me one night that they’re just like our Sun. A thousand splendid suns, a thousand splendid worlds where the three of us could’ve been happy. But not here.