

IN  
~~WOMEN~~  
WE TRUST

*A Novel*

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*To my family  
and anyone who has  
faced injustice*



# ONE



**B**ADRI'S EYES OPENED suddenly. Darkness. A void deeper than any black, starless night engulfed her. Eyes wide open she stared into an indiscernible place of blurred, bluish black. She squinted and blinked several times, hoping to detect something, anything.

Nothing.

Her stomach sickened with an indescribable primal fear. The darkness lengthened and then shortened like dancing shadows, teasing. Disoriented by the lack of a horizon, which even the inkiest night usually provided, she felt propelled away from earth, from reality, dizzying her steps. Lost in thought and without much balance she felt a feather light breeze graze her face tousling her hair ever so gently, reminding her that she's alive. Reaching towards it was a natural reaction and it was the first comfort in what seemed like a very long while. She leaned her thin bruised shoulder against a rough damp surface, needing support, praying for something to hold her steadily. She could barely hear the dreamy voice coming from somewhere close, echoing, calling her name. She knew it wasn't real but chose to accept it as Mimi Jan's soft whisper. The word she heard was: *Noor*, meaning moonlight. *Noor* was also another name for *Badri*, and it was a name used only by her grandmother, the love that Badri felt for her was unworldly. Mimi Jan loved short words, and it rolled easily off her tongue in a way that "Badri" never could.

Her voice felt as close as it sounded, coming from somewhere in those dancing shadows, and Badri sensed it right alongside her.

“Mimi Jan,” Badri whispered back, twisting around rapidly, in desperation. “Where are you? Why can’t I see you?”

“I’m right here, just as I always will be...never far.” Mimi Jan whispered back.

Badri continued to twist and turn quickly but was still unable to see the phantom voice.

“Look up my Noor.” Mimi Jan laughed from above. Badri’s eyes, dilated wide from the darkness, narrowed instantly at the sight before her.

“Mimi,” she whispered in awe.

“How are you my dear - my Noor?” Mimi Jan asked with the familiar compassion that in the past had soothed her.

“The truth, Mimi Jan, is that I’m in unbearable pain.” Badri’s own voice was barely audible, and her eyes glistening and burning. She was unable to lie to her grandmother, even though her instinct was to smoothly erase any hints of indignity or malevolence to spare her grandmother from any weighted concern, but now the truth prevailed, regardless of the fact that she was confessing to a spirit, a ghost. To Badri, she was real.

“It will pass, my Noor, you must believe that, you *need* to believe.” She whispered.

“Will it?” Badri sobbed softly, extending her hand, wishing she would grab it, willing it to happen. She could feel Mimi Jan clutching her wrist as she used to. A bittersweet feeling overwhelmed her and she fought to contain it and prevent it from slipping away. She would hold on at all cost. Her memory of her beloved grandmother was at this time all she had.

“I’m wounded Mimi Jan.” Her agony so deep she struggled to find the words, and each breath greatly painful. “These vicious animals have destroyed me; they’ve broken me Mimi Jan.”

“Noor, it’s true, these monsters have violated you, they have beaten you terribly, and they have attempted to break you, but that is one thing they will not be able to do. They will never succeed in taking your pride. Don’t worry my dear Noor, you’ll see what happens to them, stay strong. *Allah* is with you.”

She kept sobbing, the pain insufferable, nearly to the point where she wasn’t lucid. Mimi Jan’s voice called out, “come here my dear Noor, come to me.”

Badri felt lifted, as though she was floating toward her grandmother’s loving arms as they pulled her close. She could feel Mimi Jan kiss her forehead as she used to, and in that moment, in the perpetual night she began to heal. She became aware of something other than torment coursing through her, where there ran blood there now ran fire. Her newly born strength gave her a reason to fight, and dread began to be replaced with vigilance.

Her growing courage however couldn’t stop the flow of relentless tears that seemed to be coming from someone other than herself, she could feel them running down her cheeks, but she could not feel herself crying. Every move she made hurt in new ways, and so she held onto Mimi Jan even tighter knowing that at any moment she might slip away and disappear back into the shadows. She pleaded with her to stay, “I won’t let you go. I won’t, I can’t.”

Mimi Jan cradled her as she would an infant, and ran her fingers through her tangled and matted hair hoping to soothe her. Badri’s rapid breathing slowed, and she began to feel a sense of tranquility as she recalled her grandmother’s words of kindness: “your face glows more than the moon because Allah made you extra beautiful.”

“It’s a curse Mimi Jan, my face has never brought me happiness.” Badri blamed her beauty for the extreme violations she just endured and for the hopelessness that now ensnared her.

“Don’t say that my child,” Mimi Jan retorted. “*Allah is Jameel.*” HE is beautiful, and he made everything beautiful, and you, he made you extra beautiful. Always be grateful, always be thankful.”

“I am thankful Mimi Jan, but look what’s happened to me. These animals might have spared me if I didn’t look this way.”

Badri, despite her words, knew that animals will be savage in a wasteland as easily as in a paradise, but she also needed to know that there would be an end to this brutally and unjust treatment.

“They are beasts Noor,” Mimi Jan said. “Pretty face or not, they will attack.”

Images flashed in front of her closed eyes, images nearly as painful as her physical hurts: vicious creatures in the form of human beings attacking her. She tried keeping count, but it was intolerable, so many of them taking turns violating her, laughing cruelly while devouring her, destroying her, ripping her to pieces.

Badri relived the caustic moments of that last night, the night she had lost her honor, the night she had felt worse than a beaten animal, just a soulless body gratifying their unbound lust and urges and base fantasies. She knew that she needed to stop the incessant flow of flashbacks because it was pointless, and she knew that it was possible that she might never again feel cleansed or pure. Badri knew that she, like many others alike, would have to learn to extinguish hope and quietly accept the inevitable.

She sat in a state of quasi hypnosis, gazing into thin air, streaks of tears staining her face, remembering a story her grandmother used to tell her, a bedtime story providing solace, the story that would allow her to temporarily escape. A folk lore about the beautiful *Lake*

*Saiful Muluk.* It was a tale about dreams of beauty and love, about how a child's heart is pure and unconditional and an adult's heart is tainted and conditional and easier to corrupt. Badri needed to comprehend this to be able to understand why people are so cruel, so barbaric. Maybe it would tell her that in the end evil doesn't win, that maybe good will triumph, that maybe it's alright to have hope.

She kept staring straight ahead, barely blinking, transfixed by the memory of her talks with Mimi Jan about fairytale-like love. How will good be able to prevail when an adult's love is transactional? Did these brutal beings feel love? Do they only love if they get something in return? The battle between good and evil is never ceasing. "The purest form of love is to love without expectations, and usually only the very young can do that." She recalled Mimi Jan's true words, holding onto whatever voice she could.

Badri began crying once again, or so she thought, until she realized she had actually never stopped, not for a moment, shedding tears from a pool as deep and wide as the vast sky. She craned her head up into empty space, willing the appearance of her grandmother's face, willing it to look down upon her and gently kiss her cheeks. She in return kissed the air softly almost tasting Mimi Jan's invisible tears. Tears, blood and pain—that was who she was now.

"Mimi Jan please tell me the story. Please Mimi Jan just once more." Badri pleaded, and not sure if her grandmother was still beside her, or if she was fading away.

"I'm still here my Noor, and I remember how this tale brought you comfort, and how you would have dreams of love and all things joyful." Her voice slightly softer than before. "You were so little and so lovely. You still are. I loved the way you used to beg me with your tiny hands, your lovely eyes and your sweet voice."

“Did I make you happy Mimi Jan?” Badri asked, wishing she was still that small child safe in her grandmother’s arms, in the warmth of the summer sun, ignorant to the ways of the world they live within.

“Of course you did Badri. You were the only person who brought me joy.” Mimi Jan’s voice was paling. “Every parent hopes for a sweet little girl like you.”

“Why is that Mimi Jan? Why do parents wish that their children remain small?” Badri was grasping at anything so that she could keep her grandmother close, anything to keep all the darkness around her at bay.

“A baby’s love is pure Badri. Purity in love does not, cannot belong to adults.”

“Not even me?” Badri asked, knowing the answer.

“No my dear, not even you.”

“How can you say that Mimi Jan!” Badri turned her head and wrapped her arms around her frail body. She wondered if that meant that she was no longer loved. “Mimi Jan how can you say that?” She asked again.

“Because it’s the sad truth my Noor. A child’s love is pure and unconditional, but the love in adult’s heart is tainted with other things...it is impure. It is easier to corrupt.” Mimi Jan paused for effect. “An adult’s love is transactional; they love only if they get something in return.” Badri stayed silent, she knew this already but needed to hear Mimi Jan’s voice and wisdom. “Occasionally an adult will expect and accept love in return of love, but usually they want something else. The purest form of love is to love without expectation, and usually only the very young can do that.”

“Mimi Jan, please tell me the story now.” Badri herself was beginning to tire, to weaken. “I am ready.” Her eyes closed, and Mimi Jan began.

*It was a tale from long ago, when mountains were not this tall and clouds were not this high. When trees were not so old, and flowers never shed their petals. It was a time when humans and animals lived together. There was no war and there was no hunger. There was no fear; there was only peace.*

*The idyllic world changed. Slowly and gradually the people in this world changed. They stopped wanting to live with animals, in fact, they stopped wanting to live with other humans. As time passed, the same people who used to take care of one another, would not want to so much as look at each other. And worse, this peaceful world came to an end. One man paid a very high price for this, he paid dearly.*

*This man was the great, great, great, great grandson of Joseph, and Joseph was the most handsome man to walk the earth. Nobody before him, nobody in his time and nobody after him could match his charm, beauty or strength. But just like all others he was a mere mortal and time caught up with him. He grew old and weak, but never lost his charm or kindness. No one knew his age, but it was said that he lived a very long life. He had many children, but none of them inherited the charm and beauty that God only gave to him.*

*Joseph became very, very old, and very sick and he wasn't long for this life. He was on his deathbed and people had many questions. They could not imagine a world without him. One thing everybody kept asking was: who would inherit his looks and charm? Would these things die with him? None of children nor his grandchildren possessed his wonderful attributes, they were nothing like him. The people were concerned about losing Joseph forever if there wasn't anyone to take his place, at least then, he could live on through that person.*

*Joseph, being the gracious and kindhearted man that he was, wanted to reassure the people and put them at ease. He called for a blacksmith to come to his bedside, and he whispered something in his ears. The blacksmith nodded, and said that he would return in three days. All those around him wanted to know this big secret, but the blacksmith kept quiet. He left with plans to return in three days, not knowing that when he returned, Joseph would no longer be alive. When he returned, Joseph's children and grandchildren demanded answers. What was the secret?*

*The blacksmith said nothing, not a word. The people clamored around pushed and shoved peering and craning their necks over the shoulders of others, trying to see, but they did not understand what they saw. Joseph's family asked what the iron seals meant. He reminded them about their desire to know about Joseph's inheritance, and so at that moment he presented them with the iron seals. They still did not understand, and so the blacksmith asked them to bring him a piece of paper and ink. He said he had something to show them, and that then they would know. They gave him the paper and ink, and the blacksmith dipped the seals in ink and pressed them onto the paper. After he lifted the seals from the paper, they could see two faces: the face of a handsome young man on one side, and the face of a fairy on the other. Then the blacksmith explained it.*

*The face of the man, was the person who would one day inherit Joseph's charm. It would take a long time for this man to come into the world, and into their lineage, and after a long journey, he would fall in love with the fairy from the other seal. The search for the fairy would take years, and then they would marry. This marriage would only come to pass after great struggle, and after much bravery and sacrifice on the part of the man. Once he married the fairy, he*

*would be granted all of Joseph's beauty and charm, and stay that way forever. They would make their home in the middle of a lake surrounded by very high, snow-capped mountains, which would be covered with very tall trees. They would never grow old and they would have many children, and those children would be the most beautiful and courageous of all children.*

*That is what the blacksmith told Joseph's family.*

*They stared at him fascinated, but taken aback. They wanted to know where he had heard such a story, and the blacksmith told them that he'd heard it from Joseph. One child was doubtful, another was unconvinced, and some were skeptical and blamed Joseph's exhaustion, claiming that he wasn't of sound mind and didn't know what he was saying. The blacksmith told them that they could believe him and take the seals, or he could throw the seals in a ditch and walk away. It was their choice and he had done his part.*

“Mimi Jan what happened to the seals?” Badri needing as much detail as possible. Anything to keep her away from her bruised bones and fear.

“The seals were misplaced and eventually nobody believed they ever existed, and so they became a myth. A family legend, but it didn't stop people from searching. Many generations passed but there was always someone who believed in the story.”

*One day after many, many years, a boy found the mysterious seals, he was familiar with the tale of Joseph. He polished the mysterious seals until they shined, and then he showed them off to anyone and everyone. This boy was well liked, and over time many asked him where he found the seals. The boy said he couldn't remember, and*

*the more he tried to remember, the more confused he became. So then, it was believed to be divine intervention. The boy's name was Saif ul Mulook, and because of his regal beauty and elegance, he became known as Prince Saif ul Mulook, meaning "guardian of the land." He showed of the seals to all, and the famous tale of Joseph became alive once again. They asked him if he was pleased with the face of the fairy. He told them that he was, that in fact he was already in love with her, but that he would only search for her if he knew where to look. A pious man in the crowd named Dervesh, came forward and asked Prince Saif ul Mulook if he was serious about finding the fairy He said he was. He said that he wanted the whole story to come true, he said he has known about this tale his whole life, and now that he has become the center of it all he has a burning desire to find her and complete this story and live the life of his dreams.*

*Dervesh told him to get ready for a great journey. He would need to head east for at least a thousand nights going toward the Malaka Parbat—the queen of the mountains. There he would see a beautiful lake at the foot of the mountain range, and it's there that he need to wait for the Fairy. It was known that she liked to swim in the lake upon occasion. Once he found her he would have to hide her wings to prohibit her from flying away, and that soon enough her anger would cease and she would fall in love with him, and they would live happily ever after.*

*It was a challenging journey, full of peril, but that didn't stop him. He kept going never discouraged and after a thousand days and a thousand nights he finally came to a lake which looked like paradise. He waited at this lake at the foot of the mountain range for her to arrive.*

“Noor, the legend has it that he waited twelve lunar years, and that each year that passed, as the boy grew into a man, he became more and more handsome. He never gave up hope. It was said that the divine forces of the universe brought her to life and then to him.” Badri stayed silent, waiting for more.

*One day, Prince Saiful Mulook saw her walking to the lake to swim, in the company of several of her friends. He couldn't take his eyes off her, he was mesmerized by her beauty and composure. He watched her from behind a large tree. At first she didn't notice him, but when she did she was unhappy that he had been watching her without her consent. But soon she forgave him. The following day, he took her wings and hid them, and told her that she could have them back if she would agree to stay with him at the lake for three days and three nights. He decided to call her Jamala, meaning beautiful. The fairy stayed for the agreed upon three days and three nights, and then asked for her wings and told Prince Saif that she was leaving. He asked why, and asked if she enjoyed her time with him, and she said yes. He wouldn't give up, he refused to simply accept her answer, and so he asked her why she was leaving. She told him that she wasn't free and that her soul was captive. That the Safaid Deou; the "White Beast" was her captor and that she wasn't allowed to go anywhere without his permission. Prince Saif told her that he would free her from this beast, but the fairy told him that it's not possible, that the only way she can ever be free is if the beast is dead. The Beast however was very strong and unnaturally powerful and he would not be easily defeated. Prince Saif was determined to find a way to free his love, he couldn't bear her tears and sadness. He searched for ways to weaken the beast, and one day, the fairy's friend told*

*him that she'd heard that the evil beast's soul was hidden in some type of talisman, and if the talisman was destroyed, the beast would become weak enough to be killed. And so, the search for the talisman began, and Prince Saif succeeded in finding it, and destroyed it.*

*After a long battle and great struggle, he was at last able to kill the beast. Finally, after conquering even more obstacles, and another suitor called the White Giant, Prince Saiful Muluuk married his beloved fairy and Joseph's words came true. They lived in a cave in the middle of the lake, at the foot of the snow-capped mountains covered by trees, they never aged, and they had many children. Saif and the fairy lived happily for eternity.*

Mimi Jan paused. Badri's eyes were shut.

"Sweet dreams my child," she whispered in her ear. "May Allah be with you in these difficult times, and may you have peace in your heart."

Badri was finally fast asleep. Mimi Jan began to fade away into the dark shadows, there was nothing else she could do except hope that her prayers were heard, and that faith was restored. While traveling away from Badri, she turned around and she saw her beloved Noor. Her clothes were ripped, she was covered in bruises and dried blood and she was lying asleep but not defeated on the damp dirt floor. As she floated higher up, she could see the shabby house, the dirt road and the small village where Badri had lived her whole life. Mimi Jan's ascent continued, higher and higher, until the earth was just a mere speck.



Badri's moments of sleep ended abruptly when a loud bang shocked her out of her dream state. Her heart pounded so heavily she feared it might be heard, her burning dry eyes opened wide riveted on the door, her mouth slightly agape. After a seeming eternity she blinked and swallowed and recognized her surroundings. She was in same dimly lit room where she had lost consciousness and had erased any trace of her life as she had known it.

Mimi Jan's visit in her dreams was surreal, she knew that, but she could still feel her grandmother's healing kisses on her forehead and she could still hear her soft voice telling the tale of *Prince Saiful Muluk*. "I will free your soul from this beast," she remembered hearing. Surprisingly she felt no pain. Not even when someone reached down to grab her arms and yanked her up. Not even when they shoved her, pulled her by her hair, and elbowed her in the ribs forcing her to stand. She heard the sounds of someone getting slapped. *Where was her Prince Saif from the fairytale? Where was her Prince Saif?* Her left cheek burned. She opened her swollen eyes to find several men surrounding her. The last thing she remembered was a fist coming towards her face.