

Bryn Mawr 2013

The Hijabi Monologues Project

Manual and Script

Compiled and Edited by
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1: The concept

The Hijabi Monologues resonates through the power of storytelling

By Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah
Founder and Creative Director of the *Hijabi Monologues*

Hijabi—a word that is not proper Arabic but has become part of Muslim American parlance—refers to the Muslim woman who wears a headscarf. This term, which we first used in jest to refer to a series of monologues describing experiences of Muslim women in North America, eventually stuck.

Unlike Eve Ensler’s famous production, *The Vagina Monologues*, which personifies an often private aspect of women’s lives by giving it voice, *The Hijabi Monologues* instead takes something public, which everyone seems to have an opinion about, and gives it a personal voice.

The characters of each monologue wear the *hijab*, but the *hijab* is not the focus of any story. Although many of these stories resonate with other Muslims and women in general, they do not claim to tell every story or speak for everyone.

Our stories cover a range of experiences, from the comedic to the poignant. Humorous stories include anecdotes about the people who will approach *hijabis* on any given day, ready with a range of questions about Islam, and the guys that hit on them with their often clumsy pick-up strategies - an experience shared by many women.

More poignant stories include a narrative about the day one mother lost her son to a car accident.

Stories have the potential to create a better understanding of our lives, generating empathy and a sense of shared humanity, while at the same time describing a unique experience.

Hijabis are not the only group that has struggled with outward differences which define how they are treated in society. The *hijab*, like race, has become a physical marker of difference, and certainly identifies a woman as a Muslim at a time when Muslims are subject to a number of stereotypes, public scrutiny and discrimination.

More often than not, a *hijabi*’s actions (or inaction) are viewed through the lens of religion in the same way that racial minorities’ actions are viewed through the lens of race.

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The Hijabi Monologues is about creating a space for American Muslim women to share their stories. Many Muslim women share the experience of facing an entire set of assumptions about their faith, politics, preferences, education, class, etc. based on whether they choose to wear, or not to wear, a headscarf.

For this reason, *The Hijabi Monologues* never claims to speak for all Muslim women. All Muslim women are **not** American. All Muslim women are **not** *hijabis*.

All Muslim women **are** human beings and as human beings do, they cover the entire spectrum of heroic to villainous personalities and everything in-between.

Ultimately, story-telling is the beginning of a deeper conversation. Through the power of storytelling, generalisation and categorisation are challenged. Through stories, strangers connect and doors are opened for sharing more stories.

And most importantly, the story-teller – in this case the Muslim American woman - becomes a complex human being, instead of a one-dimensional stereotype.

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2: Our HM narratives

Daniel Morrison: Founder

It was a beautiful Chicago spring day and I was driving with my friends to the Muslim Student Association end of year barbecue. I came to a stop sign and glanced back into my rear view mirror and said, "wow, five hijabies riding around with a bald white dude... we are going to get arrested!" The comment was completely inappropriate but we were all friends and one of the girls exclaimed, "I have a story about that!" And that is when we had the first idea for the Hijabi Monologues.

At the time, I was a student at the University of Chicago and I spent much of my hanging with Zeenat and Sahar. We would avoid studying and sit on the quad talking and trading stories. But Sahar always had the best stories (and she was the best story teller). Sahar and I came from different wolds. I grew up in lilly white, suburban Chicago. I am embarrassed to say that the area of town where the black students lived was referred to as LA... Little Africa. There was not blatant racism. But the quiet racism, the kind where people would say, "I have black friends" and think that made everything OK. And we did not have any Muslim students in our high school...or at least I cannot remember any. but maybe that was because it was before 9/11 and being Muslim wasn't a big deal...

I remember one day, we were drinking tea out on the quad and I was trying to be profound or controversial and said, "we need someone to wear the full face thing," and covered my face with my hands like Uma Thurman does during her dance in Pulp Fiction. Sahar asked me why, and I said that it would give people a kick to the head, "really shake the place up." She then told me she had worn the nikab all through undergrad at UofM and proceeded to tell me her now infamous football story.

You never really realize the days of your life that change you until much later. That day changed me. I am not what you would consider a religious person, but I will say that I am blessed. Sahar and Zeenat gave me the amazing gift of friendship and through that, the ability to see the world in a different perspective. I will never forget what Sahar said when I claimed, "Sahar, I don't think we would have been friends. If you wore the nikab, I am not sure I would ever have known how to approach you." She calmly looked at me and said, "No Dan, we would have been friends. I am the same person I am now. Just a person. Friends find each other."

Stories... there is always something in someone's story that you can relate to. I loved Sahar's stories because even through I am a crazy bald white dude, there was always a part of her

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story when I thought to myself, "I get that." And that was the beginning of a discussion. And she would make me understand. There is no better blessing. Thank you Sahar and Zeenat for your friendship. I look forward to this incredible journey.

Zeenat Rahman: Founder

They say that grad school is the place where you dream big ideas and are naïve enough to go after them. I was lucky enough in grad school, to not only dream big, but also to meet the two people that I was meant to realize this dream with and who have guided me on the incredible journey of The Hijabi Monologues.

I met Sahar and Dan separately, but was attracted to both of them right away. Dan is one of the most ambitious people I have ever met, and has never let anything impede realizing his dreams, no matter how big or small. He is the reason that our "what-if's" became "of course we can" in the path of realizing this project. Our project would have died as an idea without Dan.

Sahar is one of the most open and generous people that I have ever met. It is highly unusual if she doesn't invite you to her house for a meal within 5 minutes of meeting her. Many of us girls were kept well fed throughout grad school thanks to the prodigious cooking talent of Sahar's mom. And so I would often find myself in Sahar's apartment, endlessly entertained by her countless stories.

As a Muslim woman who does not veil, I have often felt that I am allowed access into spaces that others are not. I am part of the great big sisterhood of Muslim women—it is in our private spaces that we share our hopes, joys, ambitions and fears with one another. In this private sacred space, we are who we are and it does not matter what we wear.

On the flip side, I am also often in spaces where I am the only Muslim representing my tradition and fellow coreligionists. I see these chances as great opportunities, but know there is so much more than what I can convey as one single person.

Our friendship flourished through this process of discovery, of really **knowing** one another. Our project, The Hijabi Monologues, is an attempt to bridge the gaps that exist and offer an opportunity to know one another, anchored by the realization that our lives are incredibly enriched by knowing the stories of others.

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May Alhassen: Performer and Organizer

In the summer of 2008, I promised my then future (now current) sister-in-law that I would attend a Hijabi Monologues performance at the Islamic Center of Southern California she was instrumental in organizing. She initially learned of the show while studying Arabic in Cairo at Arabic language program CASA from classmate Sahar Ullah. There as well, she hosted a performance in her Cairo apartment. Though intrigued by the show's title, my first thought when I read the promo flyer she emailed me was, "Hijabi Monologues? Man, this sounds like it's gonna be corny." So, I begrudgingly made the half hour drive to the Center...and had my rug of assumptions ripped from under me the moment I sat down!

Not only did the show do the intellectual job of forcing me, a Muslim American woman, to confront my own stereotypes about Muslim American women, but it sent me on an emotional roller coaster that indelibly left streaming tears and boisterous laughs etched into my memory. At that moment, I didn't know how or what the complexion of my involvement would be, just that I needed to be involved. I contacted Sahar, via Facebook of course, effused my glowing support for the project and relayed my interest in getting involved. She emailed me back, instructing me to find a venue and actors, and then she would email me the scripts. I don't know and why she had faith in me, but I thank God that she did, as I was about to embark on my own roller coaster journey with the project itself.

As a Los Angeles organizer and former spoken word poet, I was fortunate enough to have access to performance venues and contacts for potential performers. So, long story short, I made it happen by contacting a friend who hosted an Open Mic venue in the suburbs of the Los Angeles area and enlisting two Muslimahs to each perform a monologue. And ever since that initial performance as Lionlike Mindstate's feature, I have been intimately involved in the project as an LA-based organizer and a touring performer for the show-from another LA based show, articles in national newspapers, to national shows and workshops!

Ultimately, the simple honesty embodied in the use of the storytelling method is what drew me to the project. Storytelling is far from foreign to the imprint of our (being a Muslim) faith's historical foundations. In our religious history, oral tradition was regarded as a more reliable form of information transfer, or truth telling, than the written word.

I consider narratives cultural arts forms that communicate ownership of experience. By this I mean that they do the work of resisting historical imperialism by recovering history, which results in a restoration of humanity. Art Form, that radical declaration of one's humanity, of one's right to expression, to tell his or her story, their people's history, and exude an undeniable humanity is the culminative work of narrative construction.

Hijabi Monologues is, for me, about the ownership of a Muslim American woman's experience, one that has been too easily yanked away from her by "experts" and by one-dimensional

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popular cultural productions. They are your sister's stories, your mother's, your auntie's, and your grandmother's. Her story, just like an art form, and perhaps the telling is an art form, is a radical declaration of her personhood. Even if they are not my stories, or I have not lived anything close to their experiences, I can relate to the fullness of the character and the truth told in her words.

Sarrah AbuLughod: Organizer

My introduction to Hijabi Monologues comes through a series of happenstance that somehow landed me on a fellucca on the Nile in Cairo, Egypt. As I sat there next to Sahar Ullah, a co-founder and writer for the organization, she showcased one of the many monologues in the diverse array of the Hijabi Monologues collection. In an impromptu private showing among a few friends, she passionately began a tale that ultimately drew me in and connected me with an amazing project and an even more amazing group of people.

It was not only the raw honesty conveyed through the storytelling. It was the method in which this "Truth" was given. It is one thing for someone to put their lives candidly on paper, it is an entirely different story to stand up and act it out in public. To take matters that are normally only found on the most private pages of a personal journal entry and give life to them through the art of the monologue is an incredible achievement.

Back living in the DC area, I've since helped organize one Hijabi Monologues performance and have hopes of being an active member in spreading the realities that Hijabi Monologues taps into. I encourage everyone to try to understand the importance of the stories being told here today. Almost every culture has a rich history in storytelling. Let this be our way of adding our flavor to that history.

Cristina Martinez: Organizer

I have always been interested in the ways in which people choose to share their most intimate experiences with the rest of the world. Whether it is done through poetry, music, dance, or the spoken word, sharing one's personal feelings and experiences takes a lot of courage. One may face many situations: be misunderstood, receive apathy from the listeners, face disagreements and feel vulnerable; but most importantly, performers and audience members tend to experience a sense of revival after a subject they once understood has been put in a new perspective.

When I heard about the Hijabi Monologues, I became interested because it merged three very important themes for me: women's stories, identity and religion. Furthermore, the performances and stories can appeal to an audience of any cultural or religious background, not only Muslims. It allows the audience members to re-evaluate the way they perceive and

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understand Muslim women. Most importantly, it allows us to remove the stereotypes and associations that many of us have subconsciously accepted as reality.

As I organized the Hijabi Monologue event in South Florida, I have also learned that nobody is completely free of judgement and stereotypes. I came to see how we all are like sponges, if you will, in the way we subconsciously absorb information from the media and how that prevents us from understanding Muslims and Islam; how we tend to put all Muslims under the same umbrella by assuming that their experiences are all the same.

While organizing, I came to recognize my own subconscious misunderstandings about Muslim women, increasing my conviction about the project's mission. Overall, I found the Hijabi Monologues to be a valuable learning experience for everyone involved in it whether you are a performer, an organizer, or an audience member.

Shohana Ahmed: Audience member

Hijabi Monologues gave me the opportunity to experience a performance like no other where one tries to grasp for air in a pool of emotions, whether it is from laughing too hard or keeping from crying out loud.

The stories that were portrayed through the spirited voices of Muslim women are not the fictitious stories from books found within the walls of a library, but rather real-life stories in which each of us have been characters. Muslim women who cover are no different from Muslim women who do not or those who are not Muslim in their human core of emotions and experiences.

I honestly didn't know what to expect from the viewing, but one by one as the different storytellers made their way to the stage it started to get personal. I remember while sitting back in my chair, it felt as if I was rewinding my life and projecting it onto the big screen for everyone else to witness, as I relived the moment again. Even if it wasn't my own experience, it was a friend's, or a friend of friends. Hijabi Monologues does an amazing job showing that we are all alike no matter what symbol we wear. I walked out of the hall that night comfortable with my own self because for the first time I, as a Muslim-American woman, knew that I wasn't alone.

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3: How we connect: Notes for organizers

As an organic grassroots project, the *Hijabi Monologues* seeks to break prevalent stereotypes about Muslim women through storytelling, engaging and mobilizing local communities to reach into local resources and talent, work together and organize a show.

The *Hijabi Monologues* moves people to connect in two major ways:

1) Connecting through the stories

In general, people connect to stories as human beings, women, citizens, family members, people of faith, etc. Minority communities connect because Muslim women who wear hijab often experience forms of Islamophobia along with sexism, racism, classism and xenophobia in similar ways other minorities experience prejudice. The stories touch upon themes across racial, ethnic, generational, gender, religion and class lines without ignoring or dismissing these same lines which shape our realities. Post-performance discussions and workshops allow for audience members to begin a deeper conversation and share their own stories in their individual lives and communities which move beyond the politics of identity.

2) Connecting through organizing

The project moves people to reach outside of their organizations and conventional partnerships. When individuals from different interest groups and communities come together to work on a single project, they work together with people of different backgrounds, faiths, etc. in ways they may never have before and find points of commonality – including opportunities for future collaboration on new projects.

Schedule and Checklist: Planning a HIJABI MONOLOGUES Performance

The following two sections (pages 11 to 15) are compiled by the Hijabi Monologues Producer Avery Willis-Hoffman. This is based on years of experience with the project.

We recommend at least a four month planning period

Month 1 - Preparation Month

Obtain a License

When you have the following information, please email your "intent to produce a *Hijabi Monologues Performance*" to *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com):

- Date of event
- Number of performances
- Venue information, if known: capacity and address
- Workshop information, if hosting one
- Submit Licensing fee (Bank information will be shared at that time)
- *Hijabi Monologues* will send you a Licensing Contract

Read the HM Manual and Script

Read Manual and Script carefully, send any questions about story sets to *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com)

Gather a crew of organizers and volunteers

- Producer to help with fundraising; booking a venue, auditions and rehearsal space; general organization; lead team
- Director to cast performers, shape the show creatively and run rehearsals
- Marketing to design posters, press releases and develop social media strategies (via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) for audience outreach
- Stage Manager to help with auditions and rehearsals
- Stage Technician to liaise with venue technicians - Lighting, Sound
- Costume designer experienced and familiar with various Muslim women's fashion and hijab styles across ethnicities, generations and class
- Ushers (if the venue does not supply them)
- Sign language interpreters (if needed)

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Host a Local Story Contest

- See the section on “How to Host a Story Contest and Select Local Stories”

Find Sponsors and Partners for funding

- Create a budget for event, anticipate all costs associated with the production and marketing of the show
- Reach out to partners in the community, universities and other educational institutions for funding
- Make sure your hosts and sponsors are aware, in general, of the content. For example, ask if they have a problem with the use of profanity.

Book a Venue

- Be creative. You know your communities best. Cafes, theaters, open mic lounges, classrooms, community centers, centers of worship, bookstores, etc.
- Should have a capacity of 150 (more or less depending on the community) and a private space for dressing
- Determine date(s) of event, which may depend on venue availability
- Determine how many performances
- Find out information and costs for hiring the venue including: rental fee, rehearsal space/time, technical help, ushers, promotional help (venue newsletter to patrons etc)

Month 2 - Auditions and Preparation Month

Continue with above tasks as needed

Determine Line-UP

- Once you have determined the selection of monologues from winners of the local story contest, email line-up to *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com)
- Hold auditions - it may require several sessions to find your cast
- Begin read-throughs and rehearsals

Month 3 - Rehearsal Month

Continue with above tasks as needed

Rehearse weekly

Marketing

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- Design Posters & Flyers, Show Program; email *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com) for approval
- If needed, include on all advertisements: Due to the nature of some of the language and content, parental discretion advised.
- Begin advertising through various channels and to various communities (not just Muslim)
- Book any other participants, including a moderator to introduce the show and moderate the post-show discussion
- Determine structure of workshop, if hosting

Month 4 - Performance Month

Continue with above tasks as needed

Rehearse with costumes and in venue, if possible

Marketing

- A few weeks prior to performance, increase marketing for event – issue press releases, email blasts, Facebook/Twitter updates, distribute flyers etc
- Print program, including line-up with story authors, sponsors, and actors identified
- Print out feedback form
- Blog about the experience

Venue

- Liaise with technicians regarding lighting, sound, minimal stage set up (chairs, lapel mikes)

Performance Day

- Rehearse in space, practice entrances/exits, lighting, sound
- Brief moderator and actors regarding intro/Q&A expectations
- Bring programs and feedback forms to venue
- Collect feedback forms after the performance

After the Performance

Send report to *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com)

- Audience attendance
- Survey of feedback
- Photos or video taken at performance

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How to Host a Local Story Contest

If this is the first time *Hijabi Monologues* is coming to your city, then you may organize a local story contest **at least three months prior** to the date of your show. After contacting us (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com), you should do the following:

1. Announce the story contest to network, local communities, and social media
2. Send details to Hijabi Monologues (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com) for announcement on the HM Official Facebook page; we will also link to your Facebook page dedicated to the show
3. Issue rules and deadlines (included below).
4. Convene 3 judges, including one judge from *Hijabi Monologues* (email request to HM.eventrequest@gmail.com).
5. All final submissions to be circulated to judges within a week of submission deadline.
6. Only one story is to be selected.
7. Correspond with *Hijabi Monologues* (HM.eventrequest@gmail.com) to determine if the winning story needs any edits.
8. After each judge has voted and the winning story has been selected, contact the winner to inform her that her story has been chosen to be included in the local production and announce to network, local communities and social media.
9. Invite the winning writer to attend one rehearsal to tell the story in their own words for your cast members. This will give your performers a sense of the individual's character and the story she wants to tell.

Story Contest Rules and Entry Guidelines

The following rules and entry guidelines must be distributed to participants and applied for all stories submitted for the contest in order to maintain story quality and protect the rights of both writers and *Hijabi Monologues*.

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When you send in your story, you must include

1. Confirmation that the monologue submitted is completely original to you. You are the present and exclusive and sole owner of all right, title, and interest in and to the story.
2. Confirmation that the monologue has not been published, used in an anthology, or winner of any other contests.
3. Confirmation that the monologue is a true story.

Important Note: You may use fictional names in order to protect the identities of those involved in your story.

ENTRY FORMAT

1. One (1) entry per person (one monologue).
2. Scripts in Microsoft Word (.doc) are requested.
3. The monologue should be double-spaced and no longer than 900 words or 4 pages.
4. Contact information (name, E-mail address, etc.) on the cover page only.
5. Please put the title of your monologue at the top of each page.
6. Please paginate your script at the bottom of each page: 1 of 4, 2 of 4, etc
7. Submit your monologue by emailing with the subject "[Name of city where the show will be held] Story Contest."

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6: Thinking about HM stories and How to Maintain Story Quality: Finding the universal in the specific

Hijabi Monologues Creative Director Sahar Ullah has developed the following story guidelines over the years to ensure the brand ethos and quality of the *Hijabi Monologues* story corpus is maintained. Writers and judges should use the following guidelines in order to select winning stories to ensure that they reflect the mission and quality of the *Hijabi Monologues* story corpus as well as bring to the show its local flavor.

Writers of winning stories must be acknowledged and credited in the programs distributed at a show. Winning stories may later be considered for inclusion in the *Hijabi Monologues* Story Bank.

A: *Hijabi Monologues* Story Guidelines and Tips for Writers and Judges

1. VERY IMPORTANT: *The hijab is to be used as a prop but should not be the centerpiece or story subject.* This project is not about why one does or does not wear hijab; what the hijab means or does not mean; whether one believes or does not believe dressing a particular way is important; etc. On the other hand, stories about the first day one wore a headscarf to work; stories about the day one forgot to wear a headscarf to the supermarket; stories about the day one's 5-year old son decided to wear a headscarf to school to be more like his mommy, etc. may be considered.
2. The story does not have to be something absolutely crazy or out of the ordinary. In even the utterly mundane (i.e. dinner with the in-laws, writing a letter, a moment of frustration when you couldn't find those red socks, a moment of fear when the lights went out, etc.), there can be a narrative. Some of the best-written stories reflect an eye to see the extraordinary in the very ordinary.
3. Recognizable local references to one's school, neighborhood and/or city is a big plus. Do not shy away from using Muslim (eg. "He broke his wudu" or "I can only hope that the cake turns out okay, in sha Allah"); cultural/regional specific (eg. "She was bloody tired"); or ethnic (eg. "Her dupatta was always freshly pressed") lingo. At the same time, the story should be accessible to a wide audience.
4. Stories about sexuality are fine but keep in mind that Muslim women have been represented as sexually aggressive and insatiable, asexual and sexually repressed in popular European literature, visual arts, theater and film for centuries. Be creative!
5. As an exercise, highlight the elements that are specific to the storyteller and/or main character's quirks. Then highlight the elements that are "universal." Both elements are important.

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6. Read the monologue aloud. It should sound like a story--and less like a campaign speech, sermon and/or spoken word poetry. Imagine giving the story to a performer and ask oneself, "Could this be performed?"

7. Consider how the story might speak to other existing *Hijabi Monologues* core stories.

B: Stories Speak to Each Other

The stories often treat similar themes from different angles of experience. In that way, the audience experiences through the presentation of stories a multiplicity of voices which critique and enhance each other.

Growing pains/High school/The value of friendship/Self-esteem/Peer pressure

- 1) Light on my Face
- 2) Hijab Protectors

The burden of representation as a visible minority outside one's community and within

- 1) I'm tired
- 2) Hitting on a hijabi
- 3) People you meet

Seeking self-validation through intimacy/Experiences of betrayal

- 1) Light on my Face
- 2) The Good Wife

Searching for meaning, fulfillment and spiritual consolation in moments of hardship

- 1) My Son's Wedding Feast
- 2) Light on my Face
- 3) People you meet
- 4) Inside My Hands

7: Hijab as costume

You will note, as you participate in the *Hijabi Monologues* Project, that many people have strong opinions regarding hijab. You might face questions such as “You don’t wear hijab. Why are you involved?” or “Wait a minute—you’re not even Muslim! Why do you care?” or “Why are you ‘forcing’ women to wear hijab?”

This is why it is important to explain the use of hijab as costume in this production (even if, as an experienced director and/or performer, it may seem self-explanatory). There is no need to be placed in a defensive position. Such questions reveal existing assumptions and all kinds of discussions regarding “hijab/women/Islam” “religious/secular” “modern/traditional” “liberal/conservative” “native/foreign” “integration/assimilation” which—although we should be aware of—is not what this project seeks to reproduce or define.

Here are some further notes about bringing the focus back to performance art:

A. Performance in storytelling

- 1) *Hijabi Monologues* is a performance piece as much as it is about sharing true stories of ordinary people. It has been our experience that people who see HM understand this, and both Muslim women and women of other faiths have been more than excited to perform “in costume.”
- 2) *Hijabi Monologues* is not about the following the messages: “We love hijab!” or “Down with the hijab!” or “Women rule!” or “Men are the enemy!” Rather, by conveying a range of stories, we create ambiguity where there are fixed stereotypes and provide a meeting place of shared human experiences.
- 3) We are interested in how performance can allow others to suspend disbelief and live in another’s shoes. Costume has always been an important theatrical device. Characters in the *Hijabi Monologues* happen to cover their heads and bodies in various ways which may reflect their understanding of what is or what is not hijab, their fashion sense or lack thereof, etc.

B. Playing the part

- 4) The storyteller engages a set of stereotypes that are evoked simply by her physical image, without having to say a word. That said, we want to provoke all those sentiments and engage them head-on by having women wearing the headscarf on stage. This is key to the subsequent positive, transformative experience of having

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listened to another's story. Ironically, if those judgments were not present, there wouldn't be a need for the project nor would we get comments like "It was as if I was seeing the woman and not the hijab," or "You are just *so human!*"

- 5) Consider this example of the use of image on stage: In the play *Othello*, Othello's blackness is incredibly important and his image is one of the most important theatrical elements in the play. When Desdemona's whiteness and Othello's blackness is together on stage, it is supposed to evoke a particular sentiment (horror, discomfort, racism, etc.), especially when the audience is made to imagine the possibility of sexual intimacy between the two. Shakespeare engages with these expected emotions throughout the play as the plot unfolds.
- 6) Most significantly, these monologues give an opportunity for Muslim women to take center stage as performers leading, complex roles of individuals rather than roles of religious caricatures, roles which are artificial and flat, roles in which they feel racialized, type-casted, etc.

C. Coercion and discrimination?

- 7) When the director assigns X costumes/props and Y roles for Z performers in order to best reflect the script, this is expected as part of the *job* of a director. It is not "coercion."
- 8) For example: In *The Crucible*, performers may not be "permitted" to wear jeans and a t-shirt (unless, for example, the play was to be a contemporary version of ongoing McCarthyist witch hunts). In a production of *Beloved*, you won't find the main characters wearing a *niqab* unless, again, it was being produced as a creative adaptation. Performers are given roles based on their race, height, age, weight, "look" – and often minorities have had less opportunities because main characters who look like them have not been written into scripts. Sometimes, a director might give a part to an unlikely performer if she was absolutely amazing and offered something unique to the stage like Lea Salonga as Eponine in *Les Miserables*.
- 9) If "discrimination" takes place, it is when a director decides a person should be casted and story contest judges decide a story should be selected because it flows well with the HM concept. That does not, in any way, mean a person not casted or whose story is not chosen cannot be involved in other ways as a crew member, participate in marketing, etc. or that her story is not an important narrative for another project.

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10) That said, it is incredibly fascinating (in a super nerdy way) and revealing of prevalent stereotypes HM seeks to challenge that “hijab as costume” within this show might be perceived as coercion. We are certainly interested in engaging these assumptions in which visible symbols of religion are viewed in terms of coercion/freedom, and we are interested in moving away from divisive identity politics that pit women, minorities, men, etc. against each other disallowing empathy and sympathy on a basic human level.

11) The fact that the character is not YOU or does not agree with your lifestyle (or you do not agree with hers) does not negate the possibility of a performer being able to relate, connect, and work with the character and piece.

8: What's in a name?

We say we have a “love-hate” relationship with the title *Hijabi Monologues*.

Why?

Well, we “hate” it because

- Many audience members come to attend a performance with many expectations—and judgments—based on stereotypes of Islam and Muslim women as they imagine the title *Hijabi Monologues* to conjure in the imagination. For example, organizers often get asked: “Is this only for women?” “Is this only for Muslims?” “Are you trying to proselytize?” “Is this about the Middle East?”
- Audience members come in with an expectation that the stories will be about hijab.
- The popular fixation on hijab as the visible symbol of “Muslim woman” sometimes makes it difficult for audience members to hear and see her as an individual.
- Muslim women are not just a “hijabi” or “non-hijabi” entity, and their entire life is not primarily shaped by this identity nor do their daily activities engage this identifier. There are many other dimensions of identity a Muslim woman experiences and engages. This just happens to be visible.
- People automatically think of the *Vagina Monologues* and expect a parallel in which Muslim women will speak about sexual violence, their sexual desires and sexual experiences. Often, this expectation is coupled with an understanding that Muslim women’s sexuality is so different from others because it is tied to their particular experiences of living Islam in their communities.

We also “love” the name because

- Curiosity and expectations draw in a wide range of people as an audience.
- If we can humanize the most visibly marked among Muslims in these times, we can humanize Muslims in general and actually, many other minority communities.
- The performance value of hijab on stage is one of the elements that consistently distinguishes the project and actually allows us to be in conversation with other theatre pieces on racial and religious minorities.

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- We are able to engage those who consider women as a “blob” in the “hijabi” category and then direct that same audience to leave such judgments and see individual human beings.

- People automatically think of the *Vagina Monologues* model and most importantly, understand the HM project as a movement about community upliftment and not about creating individual super stars.

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9: Why we don't discuss "hijab in Islam" (and other overdone "hot topics")

Another question or comment you might be faced with after the show is—"So, what do you think about hijab in Islam?"...or honor killings, female genital mutilation, verse 4:34, jihad, suicide bombings, shari'a, etc. because clearly anyone who looks like a representative of Islam is constantly thinking of these things and these are the most significant elements of every Muslim's daily life...(please note sarcasm)...

This is what we say if/when asked such questions during the Q/A after a performance:

Of course these are interesting topics, and fortunately, they have been discussed and written about extensively. There are plenty of very good (and very bad) scholarly works that one can turn to and look up at the local library. Many individuals have taken a lot of time and have made painstaking efforts to conduct meticulous research for doctoral dissertations, produce books, films and discussions to address your questions such as the following:

Books

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-90.

Alvi, Sajida Sultana, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough. *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*. Toronto, ON: Women's, 2003.

Bullock, Katherine. *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Being a Muslim in the World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Ebrahimji, Maria M., and Zahra T. Suratwala. *I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim*. Ashland, Or.: White Cloud, 2011.

Edut, Ophira. *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image*. Emeryville, CA: Seal, 2003.

Kahf, Mohja. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf: A Novel*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006.

Mattu, Ayesha, and Nura Maznavi. *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull, 2012.

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Murata, Sachiko, and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. New York: Paragon House, 1994.

Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.

Websites

www.muslimahmediawatch.org

<http://www.altmuslimah.com>

<http://en.wordpress.com/tag/contemporary-muslim-woman-series/>

And so much more.

You might consider printing a handout of references to distribute before a show so you don't have to waste discussion time and also use the moment to demonstrate that ignorance does not mean innocence.

At the same time, we employ the fixation on hijab and Muslim women as a marketing tool and take advantage of the prevailing sentiments of fascination, fetishization, etc. which include, for example—

- Oooh, the hijab *on stage* (like hijabis on ice)!
- Oooh, the Muslim woman's version of the Vagina Monologues!
- Oooh, covered Muslim women are going to talk about sex!
- That's right girlfriend, free yourself.
- That's right, your lives suck and it's good to tell everyone why.
- Great, another lame piece about Muslim women.
- Great, another lame piece about hating/loving hijab.
- Great, another man-hater piece.
- Great, another lame piece about airing dirty laundry.
- What will *they* say about *us* now?

With such a captured audience who might not listen otherwise, a Muslim woman can then tell the stories of her life uninterrupted and unfiltered by media and public demands. She can say, This is/was important to me. This is what I live(d) through. This is what does (or does not) go on in my mind.

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Then, she presents the challenge—Okay. Now that you laughed and cried with me; now that you have spent ten minutes listening to my story—I challenge you to now judge me. Now analyze me. Now hate me. Now tell me you want to save me from my people and religion. Now tell me what my problem is. Now guess what goes on in my head. Now tell me what I should (not) choose or experience.

Again, we are working on humanizing the visibly identifiable minority community that has been marginalized and demonized on the public stage. Whenever someone wants to exoticize, fetishize or demonize, we redirect them to these human stories.

Very simply, this can be done by having people listen to a woman in a headscarf tell her story uninterrupted. Although the show may spark great questions and conversations on Islam and concepts of modesty, law, women's rights, etc.—we leave those for the experts and other forums.

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10: Audience testimonials

- I am not Muslimah, but I was thrilled to be part of the Busboys & Poets event in DC this past Friday, where the stories moved me through the gamut of emotions. I don't know if there is anything I can do to help the HM advance, but please consider this an open invitation. I bid you safe travels and much success!!
- You guys did SUCH an amazing job. I can't even tell you. Truly inspiring. And I'm sure you can see from the response that DC wants a lot more of HM. Keep up the good work and spread the good word!
- THM was great...completely exceeded by expectation...It amazed me that (the performer) could open herself to such raw emotions over and over again... By the end, I was exhausted, and I was only watching... Reminded me of a production of "Waiting for Godot" I saw a few years ago in that it lingered in my mind for hours after like a whisper....It really was a wonderful performance.
- I really enjoyed *Hijabi Monologues*...I think a western audience, in particular, would get so much out of these stories -- most importantly a realization that Muslim women are not very different from any other type of women; we have the same fears, concerns, aspirations, doubts, failings, feelings, desires and hopes...The women did a beautiful job telling the stories in their own distinct styles and voices. Kudos to the team! Really well done!
- The *Hijabi Monologues* were incredible!!! I was blown away by how powerful each act was. However, beyond the humor and the tears, what I was most impressed by was how much I learned. I walked in thinking I was fairly knowledgeable, and realized after ...a couple monologues that I, in all my liberal feminism, was part of the problem! I admit I've looked at a woman wearing a face veil and wondered if she lived a life 'oh so burdened' by oppression. Then came a woman explaining how her biggest 'burden' each morning was trying to select a colorful and pretty enough outfit so she could pass the scrutiny of people like me! I was ashamed, but also glad to have my eyes opened. After seeing the show, I have been inspired to attend some sort of teaching on Islam and the Muslim-American experience, as I clearly still have so much to learn!

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- You and the rest of the gang were amazing! So many emotions came out of me during the show; laughter, anger, tears (good tears)! You guys really touched the bottom of my heart and I pray that you succeed in opening the eyes of society through these amazing stories!

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Monologue Set

Below are two sets from which you are to choose for your production. In the event that you also have a local story to add, you must consult with the HM Creative Director Sahar Ullah to decide its placement in the set.

Set A

1. I'm tired
2. Introduction
3. Hurricane
4. People You Meet 1
5. Light on My Face
6. People You Meet 2
7. Hitting on a Hijabi
8. My Son's Wedding Feast
9. Hijab Protectors
10. People You Meet 3

Set B

- 1) I'm tired
- 2) Introduction
- 3) Hurricane
- 4) People You Meet 1
- 5) Light on My Face
- 6) People You Meet 2
- 7) Hitting on a Hijabi
- 8) My Son's Wedding Feast
- 9) The Story of the Shy, Subdued--and Not Very Sociable--Hijabi
- 10) People You Meet 3

The Core Monologues

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Introduction

These are the Hijabi Monologues.

Hijabi—a word that is not age-old classical Arabic but has become part and parcel of Muslim American lingo, referring to a Muslim woman who wears the headscarf. The title was at first coined in jest, but later stuck. In a way, this project is the inverse of Eve Ensler’s very famous *Vagina Monologues*. Whereas Ensler takes the private and personifies it by giving it voice and puts it in your figurative faces; we hoped to take something public, something everyone seems to have some opinion about and push it out of your figurative faces by giving the whole woman a voice.

The Hijabi Monologues are based on true experiences of Muslim women in North America.

And the Hijabi Monologues itself begins with a story.

I was sitting with my friends Zeenat—a fellow Bengali-American Muslim woman whose presence makes you feel entirely beautiful—and Dan...our white guy...who charmed us by being entirely comfortable with getting out of his comfort zone of privileged male whiteness.

The school year was wrapping up; we were stressed; we just finished organizing a concert; we were in debt; Masters theses were due; final exams were coming up; and so we comforted ourselves with each other and ice cream.

We chatted about our lives. We chatted about our unknown futures.

Dan liked to ask us, his brown Muslim girl friends, questions about the how’s and why’s of Muslim-ness. He knew we had different experiences and wanted to hear them. That day, I told him about my experiences as an undergrad and the many times I wondered of the people I never met because they felt I was inaccessible. Utterly different. And so didn’t approach me.

He looked at me and told me had we never become friends, he may have still felt Muslim women who wore hijab were inaccessible. I told him, “You know, at that time, I even covered my face.”

Surprised, he said, “Really?” Then he paused and said, “I wonder if I would have ever approached you. If we would have ever been friends.”

“Really? You know, I think we would have still been friends, Dan. I’m the same person. I found the people who I became friends with could ultimately see who I was.”

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So I told Dan a story.

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Hurricane

You see, I was a Hurricane. We supposedly bleed green and orange, but my blood always remained red. I know the University of Miami is a big time football school, and I was a big time nerd.

Did the undecided to triple major thing; did the hang out and have conversations with my professors thing; did the campus activism and raising awareness thing.

But I **never** went to a football game.

Until my senior year.

I decided—I'm graduating soon. I HAVE to go to at least ONE football game. People are totally gonna ask me, "So, you went to UMiami, huh? And you never went to a football game?" For the sake of my future. For the experience. For the story!

More important, UM students got in for free with a student ID.

So I told my very school spirited Muslim girl friends as the school was passing out green and orange La Fuerza t-shirts, "Hey, can I come along with you? I hear this game is big."

It was the 2004 UMiami/Florida State game—the BIGGEST game of the year. I suspected it was a big deal. I mean, it wasn't like Hurricanes had a train of cars follow each other for miles down U.S. 1 in a tale-gating party *every game*. Or Hurricanes brought in a car to the middle of campus, painted in the enemy's colors, and smashed it with a sledge hammer in ritual pride *every game*.

Anyway, I was excited. The night before, I looked through my entire closet to find something to wear. Something green. Something orange. I imagined myself as the perfect mascot—with my orange face veil and headscarf and long green dress. It would have been *amazing*.

Just my luck—I had every color headscarf and dress. Blues, purples, pinks...but I didn't have orange. So I settled for all green. I figured I'd stand next to someone wearing more orange.

The next day, I met up with Zynab and Minal. Zynab was a Shi'a Iraqi-American Republican football fanatic. She never missed a game during football season every year of her entire

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undergrad career. In the rush of getting on to the school buses that would take us to the stadium, we lost her. We tried to use her green headscarf, orange La Fuerza shirt and green cargos to guide us--but she completely blended in the sea of Hurricanes. Minal was also wearing a La Fuerza shirt. She was taller than me, had a long black pony tail, and experienced in the ways of getting to the stadium. I made sure not to lose her.

Anyway, when we finally reached the stadium, I took everything in as I followed Minal. I wished I had a notebook and pen to take notes.

Amazing! Look at all these people! (pause and look ahead) Wait, why are there busloads of students in maroon and gold?

There were buses and buses of FSU students coming in for the game. Now, that's serious commitment. Who takes an over ten hour drive to watch *a game*?

I watched my step as we pushed and shoved to get a seat. I have never seen so many drunken college students in my life...and frankly, I didn't want to get any vomit on my shoes. As I squeezed through, holding on to Minal for dear life, we turned and were surprised to see Zynab—she managed to find herself a seat in between a group of college fans and began her ritual of Hurricane cheers with them.¹

Blow blow Hurricanes blow! Blow blow Hurricanes

blow!

Take that ball right down the field

Seven points you're sure to yield

Blow blow Hurricanes blow!

The crowd was massive.

Minal and I looked ahead and saw bleachers that were placed in between the Hurricanes and Seminoles. They were relatively empty and mixed with fans on both sides. At that point, the Seminoles began their traditional chant:¹

¹ These chants can be found on YouTube.

(Raise one arm up and down “Indian”

style)

Ooooh ooooh oooooh

Ooooh ooooh oooooh

And the Hurricanes began their traditional chant:

(Raise one arm up and down with middle finger

up)

Eeeefff you Seminoooooles

Seminoooooles, eeeefff youuuu

As we walked toward the bleachers with vacant seats, I thought, *What an interesting cultural phenomenon.*

I paused again to take everything in—and not pay attention to the smoke that I hoped was from cigarettes and not weed. Suddenly, as I passed a really big UM fan who was shirtless (and completely drunk), he yelled, “YEEEAH!! YEEEAH!”

He was cheering me on because clearly we (*point to self*) were on the same team.

I quickly walked behind Minal, as my fan kept yelling, “Goooo, Green! Goooo Orange!” Other than the massive amounts of Budweiser, anti-Seminolism, second hand smoking, cheerleaders gyrating, and fans howling—the first half of the game was not fun.

We were losing.

And it was half-time. And the sun was clearly setting. I looked at Minal, “Hey, it’s Maghrib time.” She looked at me, “Yeah, let’s find some place to pray.”

So we left the bleachers to find a place to pray. We stopped directly behind the stands, but it was dark and wet and we weren’t sure if the wetness was from beer, puke, or water. We walked out, and I saw a row of cop cars ahead of me. I thought, That might be the safest route.

(Pause. Look up.)

“How about there? Let’s pray near the cars.”

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Minal looked at me, “Are you nuts? Look at us and look at THEM!”

I looked. She was right. Next to the cops were many Seminole fans who did not get in. It wasn't the usual fear of Islamophobic hatred that stopped us; at that moment, we were more fearful of anti-Cane bigotry.

Minal suggested we find something indoors, like a health clinic. “There's got to be one of those.” We continued walking.

Then we saw a trailer. No one was standing outside. We looked at each other, and Minal said, “Maybe here? Why don't we go inside and ask if it's alright to pray here?”

I looked at Minal and thought about how I looked. I was wearing a green niqab to match my green dress. She had on the more traditional football fan wear.

“Minal, you do the talking. They'll take you more seriously.”

So we walked in and my eyes fell on two men in a little room. They were wearing head phones around their necks sitting in front of some sort of panel with all types of buttons and switches and screens in front of them. They looked up at us and one said, “Can we help you?”

I pushed Minal in front of me.

“Uhm, yeah, (*clears throat*) you see, we're Muslim, we need to pray.”

Both of the men looked at us curiously.

“You need to use...the bathroom?”

Minal and I looked at each other momentarily, a bit confused.

“Uh, no, you see, we're Muslim; we need to pray?”

Again, the man asked,

“You need to use...the bathroom?”

“Uh, we can pray right next to the bathroom?”

“Sure, just make sure you hurry.”

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So Minal and I began praying in the corridor. She went into sajda and as I was bowing, the man came out and asked, “Are you alright?”

Although I was ostensibly praying, I thought, “OHMIGOD. I need to finish this quickly.”

I’m not sure what prayers I said. I’m not even sure how we ended. But as soon as we finished the third rakat, we stood up quickly, and thanked the men.

“Yeah, no problem. You do what you gotta do. We usually get students in here who need to vomit.”

As soon as we exited, I noticed a security guard standing outside. Maybe she was on break before we entered?

She was livid. As we tried to leave, she stopped us,

“Excuse me, how did you get in there? Other than employees, no one is allowed in without a pass.”

I nudged Minal and gave her the “You do the talking, they’ll take you more seriously” look.

“Uh, you see, we’re Muslim, and we needed to pray...”

Before the guard could respond, I grabbed Minal’s hand and we ran.

Quickly. We ran so fast. We ran out of the stadium. We decided to catch a bus to avoid the crowd once the game ended.

But it didn’t end right away. UM scored after half-time and tied. Then the game went into overtime and won.

And we completely missed the victory.

(Pause)

But I don’t think they could have done it without our prayers.

(Pause)

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In the ABC Sports News trailer.

**Written by Sahar Ishtiaque
Ullah**

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Hitting on a Hijabi 101²

Men are **INGENIOUS**.

When it comes to hitting on women—any woman—they are fairly creative. And fairly repetitive. But they catch you off-guard.

Sometimes.

I mean, you **ALWAYS** think the single Muslim guy—whose greatest cause is preventing gender mixing—wants to get married. Fast. Especially if he gives off the holy vibe. Like, God excites me, not women. This guy never **EVER** talks to you and then **BAM**, he likes you enough to marry you. Sometimes, he's **IN LOVE** with you—like, you were made for each other since time immemorial. How does he know?

You made eye contact.

He'll appear out of nowhere and say, "Hi, remember me? We haven't met or spoken to each other, but you have to know. We're soulmates, and I'd die if I couldn't be with you. I'd like to meet your parents."

You usually keep your distance from him. And his mother.

And you harbor a cautious suspicion about those married uncle-types who tell you, "My dear, you have beautiful eyes." And he complains about his wife and kids. And you're one-third his age. And he says, "I'm not the type of man that would use a woman for a night and just leave her." Buddy thinks he's got game. Or this woman is an idiot.

And there's the man who was a player pre-religiosity and now the biggest advocate for the benefits of polygamy. "Sister, it's a man's right. And you would be honored by God for allowing me to fulfill this right. (Pause) My first wife? Oh, she doesn't need to know." Please. Why not just be honest and say, "What's between my legs informs my analytical reasoning."

And there's the campus community activist. You know, the one who is involved in all the youth groups or is on the Muslim Students' Association board every year? He tells his parents "MSA has created for me so **MANY** opportunities;" and his greatest cause is breaking down those barriers of gender segregation? He says, "C'mon, sisters. We need more female participation! But it can't be all of you at once. Two of you at a time. And don't worry about lack of participation from the brothers. I will be there to supervise you all."

² This monologue can be told by one person. This can also effectively be shared by a group of women sitting around chatting with each other about each "type."

And then there's the Mack-tivist. Oh, the mack-tivist. You know, the one who prefaces his introduction with, "So, I just finished reading the autobiography of Malcolm X" and then proceeds with, "Man, I was so busy last weekend. You know, there was the pro-Palestinian rally and the pro-immigration rights/animals are our friends not food/make love not war protest." After enumerating his causes and dismissing the girl who insists,

"Of course you remember me! We, like, totally shared a drink at the belly dancing sheesha bar last weekend!" he slips in, "So when can I pick you up Friday night for sheesha...oh, I mean, for the human rights film festival³?" ...because clearly his list of credentials macks on its own.

And then there's the guy who insists on holding doors, recites Rumi and Hafez, and writes better than Pablo Neruda. When a group of Victoria Secret models pass by, he doesn't notice...because he's too busy helping an elderly woman cross the street or singing and playing Spanish guitar for a group of children. In between reading about women's history and creating a project for the upliftment of single mothers and children in poverty, he contemplates God and experiments with cooking and calls his family to tell them that he loves them.

(Pause)

Oh, wait. You've never met this guy. Or you're describing your friend Sabrina. BUT you definitely NEVER think the white non-Muslim guy in class or in the office is hitting on you. Especially after you convince yourself that most of these men see you as an asexual being. Being covered and all and they constantly stimulated by other much more enticing bodies. Unless he has a thing for exotic women. Or he has some weird ethnic fetish. You think, "He's harmless. Doesn't have a chance." You let your guard down. So when he says, "So what do you do? How intriguing! I'd like to know more about your research," or he says, "Now, don't you think it's unfair in Islam that you can't marry a non-Muslim man (like me)? When will there be a Muslim Protestant Reformation?" and then asks, "Can I get your number? Here's mine," you think he means to call when he gets a flat tire OR needs your library privileges OR is interested in your friend Jessica OR is another FBI informant.

Then, when you think you've met them all, you get the guy who is like, everybody's sister. Like the one who says, "Sister, think of me as your sister."

When he invites you to hang out, you casually blow him off. You know, we get distracted and you think, he wouldn't mind, he's like a sister. THEN you hear on the grapevine that the Guy tells a friend he thinks you don't want to hang out with him because he has different *religious beliefs*.

³ Substitute this with a local protest of choice. Eg. Occupy Wallstreet, Occupy Dearborn, etc.

You feel guilty so you tell the Guy next time you see him, "Oh, weren't we supposed to hang out at some point?"

Guy says (excitedly), "Yeah! Let's get some coffee!"

So you say, "Sure, sounds good."

Then Guy says, "Or how about that nice Italian restaurant?"

You say, "DUDE, that means I have to walk more than 10 minutes. How about the café down the street?"

Guy says (catching himself), "Oh, okay. Right." So you meet. He buys you coffee.

Then he says, "Oh, I love to talk about religion. Let's talk about religion."

You say, "Yeah? I LOVE religion!"

Then Guy says, "Let's meet once a week."

You say, "GEEZUS, I have SO MUCH WORK. Once a FRICKIN week?!"

Guy says, "Oh, oh yeah, I'm really busy, too" and then "*Group prayer* is great, huh?"

You say, "Oh YEAH, group prayer is AMAZING. I LOVE group prayer!"

Guy says, "I want to get to know you. Are you comfortable meeting me sometime?"

You say, "That's nice."

(Pause)

Then it hits you after you frickin' told him, "Yeah, sure. I am so FRICKIN chill dude!"

(Pause)

I think we need to find a new "sister" for our "sister."

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**Written by Sahar Ishtiaque
Ullah**

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Light on My Face

You know, it's amazing how our bodies can feel so old in just a few years. You think messing up does that to you?

Yeah.

(Turns face away in disbelief)

C'mon. I'm sure you've heard. Everybody knows. People like to talk about stuff like this.

(Pause)

You don't know I've been gone for a year?

(Pause)

Yeah. I just came back.

(Pause)

You really don't know, do you? Well, maybe I should tell you.

(Laughs uncomfortably)

...while you still look at me as a normal human being...

You know what? If everyone else talks about me, then I should be able to tell my own story, right?

My story—it's the only thing I have left.

(Looks aside. Laughs at herself.)

Well, you know how kids at school said I was fat?

“Look at Aisha, she's so fat. Whoa! Brace yourselves for the earthquake.”

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I mean, when I started covering, some of that stopped. I guess they stopped looking at *me*...but still, they could tell.

I could tell.

The girls at school—they loved the game of see and be seen. A lot of them started planning how they would be swept off their feet in their romantic fairytale Bollywood/Hollywood weddings. They knew—with their new breasts, skinny bodies, and horny teenage guys—that they were being watched. Sure, they'd complain, but most of it was fake. You could tell. Like,

”Ugh, so-and-so said this today and did this”

and

“Everyone hits on me.”

They loved it. If they didn't, why did they have to announce it to the world?

Hell, I wouldn't complain. I'd look at myself in the mirror, and when I couldn't take it anymore, I stepped away. I imagine that's what other people did, too.

New neighbors moved in when I just started high school. They had a son a few years older than me. Amir. When I'd walk home from my bus stop, I'd sometimes see him in the yard. We'd say salam. He seemed like a regular guy. Religious, too. We spoke in passing every now and then. Very formal. But he never talked down to me. And when I looked up after trying not to meet his gaze, I noticed that look of revulsion—that look I was so used to that said, “Ohmigod, you're so ugly”—wasn't there in his eyes.

It was a hard time for my family. My brother—he left home a few years before. He decided high school wasn't for him. And he just up and left.

So. Whatever. I stopped caring what those so-called Muslims thought about me. What did they know anyway?

(Shakes head.)

It wasn't long before Amir started calling me, and we'd talk on the phone. It wasn't long before he started telling me how beautiful I was; how he knew how beautiful I was. I would talk to him for hours on end hanging on to every word he said.

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Amir made it all easier. Liked me for my deen, you know? Wasn't looking for those pretty girls who were so plastic and fake.

Sometimes, we'd meet outside, and later, we met at my house. My parents were working multiple jobs, and I was always alone. He was welcome company.

It didn't seem like a big deal? I didn't think he would hurt me. We were growing so close, and I thought we would get married...

I started telling the girls about him. I was the one who had something to talk about now. They would memorize every detail and then ask for more details. So what's he look like? Is he older? What does he want to do? How exciting—your parents like him?

Oh, they don't know about him yet.

When he first touched me, I felt wanted. It was the first time I believed my body—this body God gave me—was beautiful, and he wanted it. I never could have imagined that before. Every girl that was ever hit on at school, every girl that was ever praised by the aunts in the community—was like five sizes smaller than me.

You think I'm exaggerating?

Sometimes, though, I would think about it, and I thought it was wrong. I thought something was going very wrong.

He assured me it was between us. He said people knew I was a good girl—I went to the mosque. I shouldn't feel scared. No one would suspect anything. I used to think we would get married one day, so it didn't really matter. I thought he really loved me for me. He could have anybody else, but he chose me.

One day, Sister Jamila said there was something different about me. She's always been such a good woman. She used to say how much light there was on my face. She was so proud of me when I first began wearing hijab and no one else did. But that light wasn't as strong anymore she said one day. "Are you feeling alright, Aisha?" she asked. I was so scared—did she know? Where did the light go?

And then my period never came.

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I told him, “Listen, Amir, maybe we should stop seeing each other?” but he would beg me. He would call over and over and tell me, “Just one night. Just you and me. I love you,” he’d say. He needed me, I couldn’t just say no...

But my period still never came.

I told him, “Amir, I might be pregnant.” I told him he should marry me. “We should get married, Amir. It doesn’t have to be this way. We can make it right.”

Amir stopped calling.

I told my friend Amina; I was hysterical. “I need help, Amina. You have to help me. What if I’m pregnant? God, I don’t know what to do...”

Amina told the whole school. She told everyone. But she didn’t tell anyone who helped. And all those looks of revulsion I was so used to—became looks of amusement.

Mom and Dad found out. I think something broke inside of Dad. He wasn’t angry. He didn’t yell. He just never looked at me when he said, “I need to leave. I need to leave for a bit.”

He left the country. For a few months.

And mom, she said, “Why didn’t you come to me first? Why did you go to those people and never tell me?”

I didn’t know. Why didn’t I tell her? And still, she’s the only one who stayed by me. Even after Amir pretended like he didn’t know me. Even after I ran away. Even after I hurt myself, miscarried, and bled for days.

Even after all these fake people had their fun talking about me and my family. Even after I took off my cover-up of piety.

And you know what? If Amir ever comes back, with his piety and says he wants to marry me, I’m gonna tell him, “I don’t need your sorry ass any more. All you self-righteous boys—you’re so full of shit.”

You know, there are these moments I just want to scream.

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Like, there are moments I feel like I'm dying and I can't even stand. As if there's no place for me but hell.

Why would God ever forgive me?

(Points to heart) It's hell in here. *(Pause)*

You know, it's amazing how our bodies can feel so old in just a few years. You think messing up does that to you?

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The People You Meet⁴

God, sometimes when I think about the people I've met in my life—I'm like—GOD. You know what I mean?
We bump into people all the time—and at first, it seems random, you know?

But sometimes—those brief moments—you can never forget...for the rest of your life. And you wonder, Was this moment just for me? Is there anything truly random at all?

I'm sure it happens to all of us. We might even have the same stories. Nobody is that special.

And some people you meet, they come in types, you know? And certain types—they're just drawn to you for some reason or another.

For example, I'm sure you've met the *liberal integrationists*.

I met this couple while they audited a modern British poetry class, and I enjoyed sitting with them. It was inspiring to see them so fascinated and study poetry for the sake of poetry.

At the end of the semester, they approached me to say what a pleasure it was to have met...and then, "And I must say, my dear, your accent is simply *excellent*. It's so American. Keep it up!"

Or you may have met the *Democratizing-Women's Rights-World Peace Activist...a few times*.

You know—the one who wants to save you?

Like this woman I met one day as I was walking to the parking lot. It was right after Afghanistan was bombed by the United States, and some people were feeling really good about freeing Afghani women from the clutches of evil brown men.

⁴ This piece can be told at one time, or each vignette can be told by the same performer between other monologues throughout a performance and/or in-between heavier monologues. If you choose the latter, begin by chatting with the audience and develop a friendly rapport. Of course, there is always room for improvisation.

As I walked to my car, I noticed that the shadow behind me was still behind me and getting closer. I picked up my pace, not turning around, and feeling a bit nervous when all of a sudden I heard a woman's voice:

(high pitch) "Honey, honey, I have to tell you something!"

I turned around, my heart beating fast, and faced the middle-aged brunette woman in capris and a t-shirt who stopped me.

"Honey, you're free!"

What?

"Honey, Mullah Omar can't get you!"

"But, ma'am...I don't know Mullah Omar...?"

She looked confused, "But you're free! Talibans and Afghans are free!"

She followed me...to tell me *that?* I was...touched?

She was incredibly sweet, so I politely noted, "I'm sorry, Ma'am; I don't know Mulla Omar." "Where are you from dear?"

"Fort Lauderdale."⁵

"Oh...Fort Lau-der-dale?" she said slowly looking at me up and down and perhaps wondering if I meant Fort Lauderdale...Saudi Arabia

Or perhaps you have come across the *Evangelical Anti-institutional religionist*.

This woman let me know—as I was eating a Subway sandwich by the lake with my friend—that all men of religion were devils and killers: rabbis, priests, imams.

She said in her slight Caribbean accent, as she adjusted her black shawl and black top hat, "I am a believer. An independent reverend. Don't you trust those men of religion."

⁵ The performer can substitute this with a city in the United States.

Then, after quickly glancing over the hijabi and young Muslim man sitting next to me, she noted to me in a more than audible voice: “Don’t they care about tradition? Especially her – those tight jeans are really provocative. You should tell her not to wear them.”

Fine. Well, how about *The INS-Homeland Security Citizen-Enforcer*

Like the two young men in a truck who passed by slowly as I walked to my car to kindly recommend, "Go back to where you came from" and "Hey, we're in America."

Okay. So maybe you haven’t met the others. But surely you’ve met the Cultural Anthropologist.

He walked behind me for several minutes—and when I became frightened and picked up my pace—he nervously broached the question, "So, could you tell me. I’ve just been so curious. I notice some girls wear black, but...you're wearing purple.

A cue of tribal interstitial kinships? Artifact of a cultural paradigmatic shift? Sacrificial ritualistic positioning of power within your ingroup?⁶

Really, *why purple?*"

“Uhm, well, I guess because it matches with my dress?” “Oh. It *matches*...”

And the creepy Neo-Nazi

We were alone and he offered me a cigarette as we waited for the next train to stop. I refused, given I was not about to burn the veil I was wearing. When the train did stop and I went aboard, he followed and asked me “So, what do you think of that problem over there?”

“Over where?”

“You know, over there. The Jews. The Muslims.”

I felt my scarf sticking to my sweaty neck.

⁶ This line was added after former HM performer May Alhassen improvised and included this line during her first performance of this monologue in Washington, DC in 2009.

“What do you mean? Are you referring to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?”

And then he told me he understands and this is why Jews should be exterminated.

“Uhm, are you serious? You can’t justify killing an entire people...How can you say something like that?”

Was he serious? Did he think I was so stupid to fall for a smiling face and want to bond with him?

Looking down at my brown hands, I glanced over his and noticed a small swastika tattooed on his wrist...and then quickly stepped out the door at the next stop.

But it’s not always like that. It’s not always someone who wants to analyze you or save you or integrate you.

Because sometimes—sometimes—you meet that Human being who’s also in search of meaning and looking for someone who just might understand:

I came into the library soaking wet from the rain, having just finished an intense final, and sat down in front of a computer. As I tried to wipe the puddles of water dripping from my scarf and dress, a hand quickly placed a note beside me. I looked at the folded piece of paper and turned, noticing a young heavy-set woman quickly walk away while wiping her eyes from tears.

I picked up the note, unfolded it and read what was written inside: “In these times when women are confronted with intense pressure to conform and achieve impossible standards of beauty, you have made the choice to be different. Thank you for being an inspiration. You make me realize there's hope.”

Although she didn't know it, her note came at a time where I was wrestling with my own struggle, and she gave me hope.

And I hoped to meet her again.

(Pause)

Whatever.

These moments happen to all of us.

We might even have the same stories...right?

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I'm tired.

Do you know what it's like to represent a billion human beings every day you walk out of your house?

To be looked at as the representative of an entire world religion?

A world religion.

Do you know what that's

like?

It's exhausting.

And can feel so...heavy.

Sometimes—it makes me angry.

And sometimes—I'm so tired of

it.

I'm tired of not crossing some unknown rule of gender interaction to prevent folks from having a field day and saying—See? Those "religious" girls—they're *freaks*.

I'm tired of not going to class because I didn't read the assignment, and if I don't say something incredibly brilliant my silence will be attributed to being inherently oppressed by my religion, men, and clothing...*rather* than the fact that I didn't do my homework because I was screwing around on *Facebook* the previous night like **90% of the class**.

I'm tired of carefully picking outfits—colors, accessories and silks—everyday for public relations purposes, to ensure I look "approachable yet modest" rather than "withdrawn and oppressed" when really, some days, it's just so much easier to throw on my linen shawl and black abaya over my pajamas.

I'm tired of putting on my understanding patient face every time some idiot asks me "What do you speak over there?" and "Why do your people hate us?" and "Is Islam and the West at war?" instead of saying—HELLO. Do you not see me? Do you not happen to see that I'm standing right here in front of you and I am NOT wielding a sword?"

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And I'm tired of wanting to curse but don't when some guy cuts me off on the highway and laughs through his window OR another guy asks my friend while waiting for ice cream "Where ya'll from?" and after my friend responds "Miami" he says, "Listen. Don't fuck with me. When I ask you where you're from, don't fucking tell me Miami; you tell me where you're from."⁷

I don't respond. Because I'm scared.

And *everyone* is watching.

I don't want them to think—There goes another angry Muslim. Just can't control their tempers. So emotional.

Because it's not like that at all.

I am not another angry Muslim.

I am not a bad example. I am not a good example.

I am just NOT a *representation*.

I am a human being. My name is _____.

And when I do break and say, "You know what? Fuck you. What the hell is your problem, asshole? Where are YOU from?" it has *nothing* to do with my religion.

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⁷ The city "Miami" can be replaced with any other city in the United States.

Hijab Protectors

Sometimes, when I think of how we perpetuate injustices because of the injustices we've experienced, I wonder about how life narratives shape our perceptions concerning the world and its quirks.

And sometimes, I wonder about the people we love entirely without entirely knowing them because of those we've met in our past who have shown us small and great kindnesses.

I was in twelfth grade sitting in my World Religions and Philosophy class, when the high school star debater and goofy-kid extraordinaire made a comment about the prettiness of my white silk hijab and flower-printed dress. [He thought it ironically funny to juxtapose his appreciation of modest elegance with a cat call.] That comment led to a discussion with other students about religious beliefs which led to a discussion about Islam and dating and arranged marriages which led to a discussion about Sahar's wishes not to be touched by a guy unrelated to her unless she was falling off a cliff [or needed something less drastic but life-saving like CPR or the Heimlich Maneuver.] And somehow, that discussion led James—the tall, short brown-haired, anti-establishment kid sitting in a nearby desk—to come to the conclusion that he would, from that moment forth, be my Hijab Protector. He vowed to deflect the males who would attempt to approach me within a 30 feet radius.

To tell the truth—after I laughed, imagining a tall white kid wearing a cape with a big HP on it, trying to intimidate the evil males of the world—I was flattered.

Later that week, as I was crossing the courtyard on the way to class, my friend Logan ran across the grass like a madman and suddenly gave me a bear hug and noogie.

"Sahar looks like strawberry sherbet!"

[I was wearing a peach-ish colored Moroccan jilbab—the type with a hoody. Mom bought it for me during the previous summer in Mecca. The store owner, who managed to give a name to every jilbab I touched, told Mom it was the “springtime for Sahar” jilbab as opposed to the “King Abdal Aziz jilbab” and the “I want to marry you” jilbab. I managed to avoid wearing it until Mom found it in the back of my closet and promised I did not look like a peach in it.]

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Totally not expecting Logan's reaction, I froze, sort of embarrassed, thinking, "What the hell is going on...!?!..."

I don't know what look I had on my face, but Logan's best buddy R.Jay—a fellow water polo teammate and punk-rock band member who did not smoke-sniff-drink, had a crush on the same Asian girl, and also dreamt of med school and Berkeley—looked at me and then looked at Logan and said, "Logan, I don't think you're supposed to do that."

"Huh? Wha?"

"You're not supposed to touch her!"

"Huh? Oh, no! Oh, Sahar! Man, is that true? You gotta lemme know about these things!"

"Uhm..well..uhm"—I was squirming—"Yeeeah. I mean, I'm not offended or anything, but yeah, I'd prefer you not jumping on me and stuff."

"Dude! You gotta say something—you're too nice! Don't be shy about telling me what's what"—as he spoke, he put his arm around my shoulders in chum-like fashion—"I would never be offended by you!"

Ever-perceptive R.Jay again came to the rescue: "Logan!"

"Oh!"—he jumped and moved his hand—"Dude, you're too nice—punch me or something! I'm so sorry"—and again patted my shoulder.

R.Jay gave Logan a look.

"Oh!"—Logan jumped again and removed his hand—"Geezus! I'm so sorry, dude!"

[At this point, I was laughing because of his sincere repentance, concern and simultaneous clumsiness...]

"Listen, Sahar, from now on, fear no more! I'll be your HIJAB PROTECTOR, guarding you from the advances of the male population!"

I thought for a second at the familiar conclusion he came to—

"But, Logan, I believe you will have to talk this out with James. He's already claimed that role." "James?! That fool? He doesn't have what it takes. I AM the true HIJAB PROTECTOR!"

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So I thought: Okay. I won't burst anyone's bubble. Let them fight it out during lunch time.

I also thought—Silly boys, like, they won't really take this seriously—until one day...

I was walking to AP Calc II with my friend Amanda—a cute brunette soccer player aspiring to be an engineer and keep kosher—when Tito, a member of the National Honor Society, *tapped my shoulder*. He pleaded with me as NHS recording secretary to have mercy and accept his hours although the deadline for turning in service hours already passed. I told him not to worry—his hours would be accepted, and Tito happily skipped away knowing he would get to wear the cord for service on graduation day.

Later that day, after AP Literature class, I walked out to find a ring of four students waiting outside with James and Logan. So I said, "Hey guys, what's up? (*Pause*) What are you all doing here?"

(*In a very "We-are-the-Hijab-Protectors-to-the-rescue" tone*)

"Who touched you? We heard about it."

I had no idea what they were referring to.

"What are you talking about?"

"Who touched you?! Amanda told us! Do you want us to break his fingers?"

[Now, to understand the humor in this scene, please imagine a ring of slightly-nerdy guys of different heights, some with funny-looking glasses, one Columbian, the only black guy I know with freckles and a speedometer painted on his dash board with white out, and all with huge bookbags filled with AP Calculus, AP European History, and AP Biology textbooks.]

"Uhm, what are you talking about?!"

"Amanda reported to us that some guy tapped you on the shoulder, man!"

"Ooooooh, thaaat"—by this time I realized they were talking about Tito, poor kid. "Oh, yeeeeeah. Listen, it's no problem. It's not really necessary that you beat him up or something."

"Really? We can cover his eyes first so he doesn't know who's hitting him."

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"No, really, I'm sure. Let him go this time, but thanks for offering. Maybe next time?"

"You sure? We could just threaten him."

"I'm positive."

And that was the end of that.

And I will never forget them as a fitting gift when I had just lost an older brother; when I stood out because of how I played, dressed, and ate; when how one looked often determined whether the cool kids draw one into their cool circle or make one's life adolescent hell.

I will never forget when one underclassman thought he was slick for mocking me and I was able to calmly look at him, eyebrows raised, smiling, because I was confident that at least one person from the group of friends with whom I was playing hacky-sack would kick a hacky-sack in his face.

And my heart would break, having known them, to know that someone not having the same life narrative would want to harm them because of an accident of birth—call it nationality, color, or creed—rather than want, in their most secret prayers, light on their path and the best of divine gifts, knowing God of humanity had used them as protectors of a Muslim woman.

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My Son's Wedding Feast

As soon as my son came home from college, I began dreaming of him getting married. He was my first.

Every mother knows what it's like when your kids get to that age—you want to see them settle down. Have your grandchildren.

I told my son when he came back: "I want to look for a nice girl for you. What do you think?"

He told me, "It's a waste of time, Mom. I don't have a job. I don't even know what I'm doing with my life."

He thought he had nothing to offer.

(Proudly) My son?

My brother came to visit with his new wife for a few days. The night before they left, I took him with my younger kids to go visit an old friend suffering from cancer. The doctors said he didn't have much time left.

I told my son, "We're going to visit your Jubair Uncle. I left you dinner on the table. Don't go out before eating something."

By the next morning, he was still was not home. I thought—Oh Lord. What am I supposed to tell my new sister-in-law? What is she going to think? Why did he have to do this today?

The kids all woke up late and missed their bus. My son was still not back, and I couldn't focus. I yelled at everyone and told them to get in the car. I don't know what came over me but the kids being late; I had to drop them off at school; my son still not home after being out all night; my brother and new sister-in-law getting ready to leave.

La ilaha illallah.

I couldn't focus on the road. Somehow, I dropped the kids off and came back home not focusing.

La ilaha illallah.

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Around 10 AM, I came home. As soon as I turned onto our street, my heart stopped. There was a police car parked in front of my house. You know what was my first thought? My son. Oh my God. Did he hurt someone? Is he in jail? What are they doing here?

La ilaha illallah.

I jumped out of the car. When I knocked on the door, my brother opened it and before letting me in, he held me and said,

"Apa, whatever happens—whatever they tell you—pray two rakats. You must accept it. You have to be patient."

"Saiful, let me inside. Where is my son?"

I walked in to see my niece, my sister-in-law and two police officers sitting in our living room. My husband was still at work.

They asked me to have a seat. I would not. They said, "Ma'am, are you Shahriar's mother?" "Yes. Yes, I'm his mother. Where is he? Did he hurt someone?"

They looked at each other. They were so kind. Soft spoken. Very well-trained. "Ma'am, your son is in the hospital."

He's in the hospital.

They were waiting for one of the parents to come home before they could say anything, the elder one said.

"Is he alright?"

They looked at me with soft eyes and the older officer said, "No, ma'am. I'm sorry." Then he looked down.

"He didn't make it."

--

He didn't make it.

--

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I prayed two rakats.

I don't remember the entire month that followed very well.

It was the month the lychee tree branches hung heavy with fruit for the first and last time.

--

My daughter tells me there were many, many guests. Hundreds. Not a day went by the entire month that the house was not overflowing with people.

Not a day went by that there was not a feast.

There was the moment I heard her calling my name when she came home a few hours later after her father's friends picked her up from school.

"Where's my mother?"

She thought something had happened to me. No one had the heart to tell her but one hundred eyes looked at her as she looked for me. And when she came to the women's room, she found me, the mother of her brothers and sisters, sitting on a couch surrounded by women sitting quietly. She came close and fell to her knees.

"Mom?"

It must have been a strange thing. She said I smiled at her and said, "Today is such a good day..."

"Mom...?"

"Didn't you hear the good news?"

"Mom?"

"Today is your brother's wedding day..."

--

I don't remember that entire month very well. By the end, all the lychee fruit was gone.

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"Don't let any guest leave without having eaten," I have always told my children. That day, I told them, "God has laid out the feasts for your brother's wedding."

--

At some point, a young woman with short blonde hair walked in and asked to meet the mother of the house. She passed through the men's room and came into the women's room. Her eyes filled with tears. She hugged me.

"I know what it's like, sweetheart. I know. I lost my son, too. We're sisters, you know?"

--

I can't remember who came in. I heard there were hundreds and hundreds of guests so many of the men went to the mosque...and there was so much food, much was sent to the mosque with the men.

I was told that there was no one who came to visit who did not eat.

--

You know how a bird quickly swoops to pick food off the ground? My son was like that. No sooner was he on the ground that the birds quickly plucked him up.

And yet, no one has seen a wedding feast like this one.

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The Story about the Really Quiet, Subdued, Shy and Not-Very-Sociable Hijabi

This is not my story but a story of another hijabi.

I'm going to tell it because I don't think she ever would. She's one of those really quiet subdued ones.

You know, very shy. Not very social. Always looks at the ground when she walks.

Her name is Farzana. We all knew her from school. But we never heard her say a word. She'd walk from home to school and then from school home. Everyday.

We lived in the same neighborhood so we'd see her walking, but she walked alone.

Farzana was very plain. Her scarves were plain. Her skirts were plain. Her shirts were plain. Her face was plain.

We used to whisper how she's probably the one who messes up the curve in the class. You know those girls – they just study and have no life.

But I used to feel bad for her. I used to think--she's one of those who are really easy to pick on. I could have tried to be her friend but she was just, you know, one of those really quiet shy hijabis. I used to feel guilty but then told myself, Some folks just rather be by themselves.

Then one day, when I came home from school, a friend called me,

“OH MY GOD. Did you hear what happened today with Farzana?”

My heart began to race. I thought maybe someone picked on her. My mind quickly imagined some guy tripping her and making her fall or some girl putting chewed gum in her books. The guilt for not being more friendly and pity for her loneliness all came rushing back. We could be really mean.

“No...what happened? Is she okay???”

My friend started to laugh.

Actually, I think she might have died of laughter.

“WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU? Is she OKAY?”

“Oh, Farzana is totally okay. She's actually my hero...On the other hand, I think the dude she beat up is still feeling it.”

What? Farzana...got in a fight?

So apparently that day, Farzana was on her way home from school as usual. She took the same route she took every day. From home to school and from school to home. She walked the same way. Never looked up. Always walked on her own.

On that route is a small store a lot of us pass. In front of that store usually stands a big tall young man who hisses and makes comments at passersby. Usually girls. We usually ignore him.

That day, he decided to go up to Farzana and say “Hey baby” and gave her scarf a slight tug as she walked by.

No sooner had he done that, the guy felt someone jump on his back with one arm around his neck and the other arm hitting him.

He began turning left and right trying to see who was on him. He tried his best to shake his attacker off.

He then called out, HELP! Someone HELP Me!

People started gathering around.

They saw that the tall young man clearly had a small thin quiet subdued hijabi on his back punching him...and he couldn't get her off.

And the crowd wasn't sure who to help – the big tall man or the small hijabi—so they just watched on.

Then he finally said,

PLEASE! Stop! I won't do it again! I promise! I promise! Please! I'm really sorry!”

And then Farzana jumped off of him.

She brushed off her long coat. Picked up her books. Gave him one long look and continued walking home.

But not before the crowd opened up to let her through and watched her as she walked, eyes down, plainly dressed in plain colors, on her own.

Just to reiterate:

This is not my story, but another hijabi's story. I thought I should tell it for her because I don't think she would. She was just, you know, one of those really quiet shy not very sociable hijabis.

Written by Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah

So...what's your story?

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