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Al-Bandari Al-Kuwari Mohana Rajakumar ENGL 242 Gender in Arab Popular Fiction December 3, A Wretched Open Road A of freedom, they call it. The smell of New York would not change in a million years; not blossoms, but it was something distinctive. The smells emanating from the open-air cafes; an outdoor dining, hotdogs, and burgers were all over the place. The outdoor concerts, the taxis, the crowd, the unstoppable shopping, and the never-ending queue at bakeries were what make that city even more remarkable.

I was walking in the Park listening to Lana Del Ray's song;

“ We all look for heaven and we put love first.

Something that wed die for. It is our curse.”

I paused to look at the posters that dressed the trees. A worn out sign caught my eye;

“ Live to ride, ride to live.

Join us for ten days of an adventurous tour.”

I, Sarah, had nothing to surrender, nothing to conquer. On an unfortunate path, that implied my fortune - an open road of misleading thoughts; I had no hesitations in mind whatsoever. I decided to pick up my phone and call. I have always been curious and courageous. My mind was a maze. One thing led to another, no expectations, not even a moralistic precept. A guy with a refined bass and a full-toned voice, an accent that felt as familiar as one from home, answered the phone and commanded me to come over to pick a motorbike, a helmet and other protective clothes.

Saleh answered my call, one of the guys from the biker gang, a 25-year-old Saudi atheist. He used to make fun of Islam; the remission, the punishment (nar)*, reward (jannah)*. He did whatever he craved without taking consequences into account. He thought he would be forgiven of all the sins

he commits. Apart from that, Saleh was white from the inside; he was kind and caring.

Saleh said, “ Tell me more about you yourself.”

I said, “ Well, my name is Sarah Al-Marri, 18-years-old...”

Saleh sarcastically interrupted me saying, “ Bedouin? I thought you had cultures and traditions to follow.”

I took off my black, leather gloves and waved my hand that was patterned in abstract art of henna. In return, he rolls up his jacket and shows me his colored, very detailed tattoo that looked like a print on fabric. To be honest, I was more attracted to his big muscles and veins than his tattoo but I shook my head trying to control my thoughts saying, “ Wow! That shows the contrast between us.”

On the fifth day of the tour my motorbike ran out of fuel, so Saleh invited me to ride behind him. I tightened my grip around him, hugging his back and closing my eyes. I caught a whiff of his musky leather scent as I breathed in - very masculine. I felt so secure with him, and I longed for this moment never to end. As time passed, our friendship grew into love.

My passion for riding, though I was the only girl among seven burly men, made me join the gang. My friends tried to convince me to change my mind, to stay at university and become a lawyer, but they did not understand - I was born to ride. I have forever had a love for freedom, and for that I am naturally attracted towards riding motorbikes. The feeling I get when I ride, associating it with the open road, the wind blowing through my hair and feeling that cool sensation on my skin makes me ride without constraints.

My love for Saleh and motorbikes made me join the gang. “ A biker gang,” they have titled us. In every nation, we had put up the kick stand and took

off. An outlaw crowd of wanderers, we resembled aimlessness in every manner from every angle, yet we had a devouring desire for each and every encounter and passion for freedom. We had nothing to lose, nothing to gain; lost, and so far from being settled. I was often the unusual party; curious, odd, yet significant. I believed I had an exotic soul in the uttermost glorious approach to freedom. I had always argued, if I can balance my bike, I surely can balance my life. My mother always claimed, “ Bikes are for men. Riding bikes is frowned upon for girls and no one will marry you if you ride.” Two years down the road of being on a boundless tour, and my memorable times with them were the only things that backed me, my only gratifying times. A high and deep read of emptiness was what I called home.

Nightlife never ended; it was the life of Las Vegas. Since it was a city known for its decadent, yet elegant and a classy cup of beer, we decided to pull off and give it a shot. It was exactly how people described it; sparkling and buzzing. We had a good laugh that night, a good laugh that will last within my heart until forever. We were high to the point that we dismissed everything from our minds; the fact that we have no home to return to at the end of the day, our fears, worries and tears were all forgotten. Saleh insisted on taking me with him, as I would be safer. However, sometimes the sexual desires exceed what they call “ love.”

Saleh laid me down on the bed and kissed my lips roughly. He then moved from kissing my lips to my neck. He reached to unbutton my shirt, but I held his hands to try to stop him. He used force to keep me down and raised up my shirt to feel his skin on my weak body. His hand slid to unbutton my jeans. I screamed against his neck, “ Saleh, I beg you. Let me go.” However, he did not listen to me. He pulled my jeans off and pressed his body against

mine. “ Wider,” he ordered roughly shoving nudging my thighs apart. He settled himself heavily between my thighs and rocked my body, just like a battlefield. Saleh took a short break, and I tried to run, but he dragged me back and forced me to have sex with him a second time. He destroyed my honor and violated my body to the incomprehensible pits of mortification. I said, “ Saleh, you are hurting me.” and grasped to the edge of the blanket as if it was my life, closing my eyes tightly enough to make my mascara bleed, hoping he would stop it soon.

I woke up the next day and found myself naked next to Saleh. I questioned myself, how did that happen? How can the devil tug me toward someone who appeared so much like an angel when he smiled at me? How could he play with a heart that loved him with all its bits? Was I a palatable morsel in the mouth of the devil? After realizing that he took advantage of me when I was weak, I could not feel more worthless or degraded. Saleh went from being my great lover that I would have married someday to the murderer of dignity. He made me his captive after being his princess. I moved off the bed and put on my clothes to leave, but Saleh woke up and grabbed my hand, “ Sarah, I apologize for what I did yesterday. You know that I love you babe.” I yanked my hands from his and left. He shouted, “ Babe, I can pay you for what I did yesterday.” His name is Saleh, but I do not think he is saleh* after all.

A string of questions rang through my little mind; and each moment, I gave myself a reason to censure the whole predicament on me. “ Did I really have to come out as a strong one, from a community where the gender segregation was very prominent?” , “ What would my parents make of me, won't they denounce me, or worse still, have me killed; slain like a rat, in <https://assignbuster.com/literature-creative-writing/>

cold blood?” The very innocent and naïve soul had been torn apart. Indeed, I had very strong conviction that was arising from inside; about the males. The little soul developed a very passionate hatred for men, but worst of all, I hated myself too.

I thought I loved him, and him too, me; he even told me. Did he really do it to take advantage of me or was it out of lack of control over his desires and lust? No, I think it was out of sheer love, but engulfed by the desire to have me. Momentarily, my little gem had turned into sludge, and all I could think of was how to get rid of him. My motorbike was out, and it was him that had assisted me on his to this desolate place, away from home. With so much pain, I had to figure out a way of getting out of my predicament, after all, home was not my primary wish. I no longer belonged there. I would be shame to my parents, and the community would never accept me. I would be a total embarrassment.

The gang had to set leave early that morning, however, I felt too weak to even get to ride on another’s motorbike. I had to find a hospice, and do it very fast: I had started losing blood. I took a stroll along the dingy city streets, avoiding the sufficient light areas for fear of being spotted by someone who could judge me. As words would have it, I was lucky enough to come across a health facility that was open; it was ever open. I tiptoed to the entrance, and just before I could make it through to the hospital, I passed out. I later woke up and found myself lying in one of the hospital beds. When I opened my eyes, though I could hardly see, I managed to make out the image of a young lady looking down at me. She smiled and whispered, “ Good evening madam. .. You have been out for about eight hours. However, you are now safe.”

I later on narrated what had happened, and what had come of my trusted guardian angel. Was I lucky the whole time? This place I found myself was not actually a hospital; it was a center for caring for gender violence victims and keeping them safe from the society. “ You can stay around if you want, but if you have to leave, then you will do so once you are in good shape,” these were words from the main doctor, who was also a female. Later in the night, we gathered around a large table meant for serving supper and sharing of experiences. It is at this point that I learned most of the nurses were victims of the same circumstance I found myself in.

From this point, I felt the desire to live; to prove to the whole world that whatever happened made me stronger. I made up my mind to join the nursing school at the center, and soon graduated. At the center, I was never alone; I had sisters as well as the head nurse who was like a mother; who cared so much about us. It is upon graduation three years later that I decided to get back home; a place where I had long been buried and forgotten. My parents could not believe that I was still alive; however, my mother got to believe it. I told them my story, what had come to me the whole time and how I managed to help myself out of the situation. Even though it took some convincing to let them share my story with the world, my mother eventually encouraged me to do so. As I stand here, I wish to let everyone know that I was once a victim of rape, and to all those out there who may have undergone the same fate and suffered silently, it is time to come out.