

## Forging Ahead - The Blooming Rose: A Mother's Journey (Hadi Mroue)

### **2018 Australia**

It's a white room. The metal handcuffs are suffocating your arms, leaving red marks. Proof of your captivity. You sit in silence for what feels like an eternity, the air thick with anticipation and the faint hum of the fluorescent lights buzzing overhead. Not a whisper, not a sound, just the stillness of the room pressing in on you. Have they forgotten me? The thought creeps in, heavy with unease. Then at last, the door groans open with a slow, deliberate creep. A police officer's silhouette spills into the room, slicing through the harsh white glow like a shadow coming to life and one leaving.

"Malik", he says cautiously, his gaze sharper than a thousand words.

"Yeah?" you respond, throat dry, heavy with every breath tasting of fear. Time stretches forever.

Finally...

"Your mum, Fatima. I have some bad news about her."

The world tumbles. It begins to close as your lungs seize. The cuffs feel tighter, controlling you. Your vision blurs with tears. "What happened?" you say, voice more cracklier than the soil of your homeland.

### **1997 Syria**

The thrum of bombs is relentless. No breaks tonight. You peek behind the kitchen door; your mother. A single mother of three stands at the stove, stirring lentil soup with hands that tremble ever so lightly. You know she is scared and just wants to cry. To collapse beneath the weight of this chaos brought upon us for no reason. But she stands chin lifted, like a rose refusing to wilt under the spotlight.

Above you, the single bulb overhead flickers in time with the ever-closing blasts. Each tremor of its light echoes the fragile pulse of hope itself. Every incandescent breath, a quiet defiance against the encroaching darkness. But you start to feel the thud of the bombs deeper in your heart. Reminding you that there is no safe moment left, and that you should all leave before the light gives out, as bombs wait for no one.

"Yallah Malik!" (Hurry up) she tells me. We dash through alleyways; each turn is an echo of danger. The world begins to feel smaller.

Boom. Your world implodes. A scream rips from your throat as debris falls. Smoke fills the world, thick and choking. Your ears ring so loudly you think you're dying. "MAMA!" you scream, clawing away at the rubble. No answer. The sky fades from grey to black as you fade out.

You feel potholes beneath you. You're in the back of a battered taxi, dust clinging to your clothes like ash after a fire. You glimpse your mama in front of you, her face a map of exhaustion and fear. "Where's Jamil and Sara?" you question.

She hesitates before speaking. "They're— They are waiting for us." Her eyes look away, shadowed. You sense she is hiding something. A truth too cruel to speak.

Outside, once familiar streets are now unknown. Homes are piles of concrete and steel. You don't know this will be the last time you see the village where you drew your first breath, the last time you taste home.

"Yallah"(Hurry up), the smuggler barks, thrusting you all towards a boat. A hundred of your kind will be crammed onto a vessel meant only for a handful. The sky greets a storm. Like vultures circling their prey. Waves bang against the hull, each crash a promise of the unknown.

Under the flicker of a lantern, you begin to start walking to the boat. You know that its narrow deck won't be enough for everyone, but you keep walking. While walking towards the boat, you see a red flower. Its petals were bruised already from its tough life. But through all the heartbreak and sorrow, your mama finds the opportunity to remind you, even in ash, you must learn how to bloom.

After countless nights at sea, you wash up on a foreign land. Inshallah (God Willing), it's home now. You're moved into a refugee camp. A maze of tents. The air is heavy with despair and a hope for a better future. Mothers are cradling their crying babies, while men stare towards the everlasting horizon. In silence. You and your mum share a ration of bread, eyes locked but no words.

At nightfall, she begins to write. By the lamp, she scribbles in Arabic, inside the notebook that she has kept since last Eid. Each page is a new tribute to her lost friends and children. Jamil and Sara, swallowed by chaos. She then vows the rest of her life to keep you safe. You. She calls it:

'The Blooming Rose: A Mother's Journey'.

In Australia, you grow up in a world of promise. Each class is bright, and the parks are the ones where you hear planes for joy and delight. Symbols of connection, not destruction. Yet

something in you grows. A plant with pines begins to grow. You see classmates battle for their ego, and sneer at the very freedom their mothers escaped fr. “It’s just a letter on paper,” they say. But for you, it’s a paper with the key to freedom. After all, every word in your mum’s book was brought from the devil itself with terror and sacrifice.

You slip into crime. Not big stuff, but just enough to numb the shame. Stealing food, money, and other stuff. You tell yourself it’s for you and your mum’s survival, but really, you’re punishing yourself for every moment you felt too weak to honour your siblings and her journey for you.

### **2018 Australia**

You’re back in the white room. The cuffs are still stuck on your skin. A different type of interrogation. A mental barrier, a shame barrier. A memory barrier. Ayb (Arabic phrase to shame people), you think of yourself. You think about the damage your mum went through, living within the scribbles of her notebook. Its petals dried and fragile.

“Malik,” the officer says. “Your mother... She passed away an hour ago.” Pain ricochets through you. You taste iron. The cuffs grow heavier. “No,” you choke. “La, la, Ya Allah”(No, No, Dear God).

Outside the police station, the world hums as if nothing happened. But inside, nothing is growing anymore. Not even the petal of a flower.

As you’re barrelling towards the hospital, all you think about is her. You don’t care about the speed limit. You want to see her for one final time, even if she isn’t alive. You meet her voice in your mind, soft like velvet petals, soothing like rain on parched land. Then, you see your mother’s face as you last knew it. Pale but as strong as a rose blooming at dawn, even in death.

You close your eyes and remember her words. Whispered in the battered boat. “Even in ash, you must learn how to bloom.”

Tears run down your face, but they are also watering your flower, deep beneath the crescents of your broken heart. Like that flower she carried across seas, into the life she dreamed for you. You think to yourself that with self-care, it will once again bloom and flourish like it used to in your mum.

### **Reflection of life**

As time has passed without someone to guide me directly, I have truly begun to understand what my mum was trying to say to me. She was trying to tell me, when everything seemed to be going wrong... To always stay strong.

To honour the people who have sacrificed their lives so that I can forge ahead. I publish my mum's notebook, 'The Blooming Rose: A Mother's Journey', to honour her.

To Sara, Jamil, and my mum.