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## No More Fours

**Helmi Ben Meriem**  
**Tunisia**

“Samar. Habibti. Yalla al madrasa.”

“Yalla mama yalla.”

Today is the first day of school. I am Samar K. from Qalqilya in the West Bank. I am seventeen years old. The top student in my class. My family is proud of my work at school. We live in a small house in AlRazaza, west of Qalqilya. The house was my paternal grandfather's house till he died; then, my father inherited it. My two uncles, living in their newly-built houses in the north of the city—had no objection letting my father get the house. My father, a construction worker, earns less than seven hundred Jordanian Dinars. How does anybody expect him to build or buy a house of his own?

I hate when people talk about money using the word Shekel. Colonization of another type I think of it.

I have two brothers. Ahmed is a carpenter, who works in a nearby shop. Samir works in a cattle farm in the open field east of Mohamed the Conqueror Mosque. Our house has two bedrooms: one for my parents, and the other for me; my brothers sleep in the saloon. Not fair. Poverty-stricken Qalqilya.

In my early years, I used to wake up and look from the window. Acres and acres of olive trees stretching around Qalqilya like a *lihaaf* a mother wraps around her baby. Protecting the baby-city from cold and heat. As I was walking towards the school, I remembered the days my mother used to take us to the olive orchards on Fridays' morning and have a breakfast under the greeny olive tress between Qalqilya and Hable.

I reached the school in ten minutes. Stood in front of the gate. The outer wall, which is not high at all, separates the school from the busy street that links Mohamed the Conqueror Mosque and the Roundabout of the Martyr. I went inside and looked at the inscription on the three-storey arch: High Schools of Daughters of Al-Khansa. The flag flying on my right. The isosceles red triangle pointing to the inside of the school as if welcoming and inviting me to go in and to start the new school year. I walked up the four steps that separate the outer courtyard from the inner hall.

The first hour was with Mrs. Khalida, the teacher of mathematics. I sat beside my dearest friend Majida. She has been my friend since primary school. The hours went by so fast. By two p.m. I was on my way back home.

Ever since I was a little kid, I hated going outside very much; I only leave the house for the most urgent chores like studying. The Israeli army invades the city and swarms its way into the city's streets and alleys as a tsunami does. Helpless we were in front of the high tide of gas bombs engulfing the city in a sickening white cloud. I am afraid of being hit again by the

army, of being pulled by my veil into the army van, and shouting my heart out demanding my freedom. I do not want to see my mother pushing her way through the soldiers, pushed to the ground by an IDF member, rescued by neighbors, and hugging me all the way to the house.

I am safer between the four walls of the house, safer between the four walls of my room, and even safer nestled between the four sides of my bed.

In the last years, Qalqilya became an island. The West Bank is an archipelago of in-land islands. Divided. Enclaves. Palestinians now live in small islands surrounded by a continuous barrier. Not the one that surrounds the island where Tom Hanks was washed ashore. Our islands are not in the midst of water; they are actually in the midst of settlements of scorpion-like inhabitants.

Our barrier, wait it is theirs—we never asked for it, is like a vicious anaconda that strangles our towns and cities. This anaconda does not penetrate the Palestinian towns with its fangs. No that is not how it is done. This anaconda keeps wrapping our towns tighter and tighter till life escapes the body of our towns, till the blood dries in the veins-streets of our towns, and the air is all consumed. Where there are no provisions for life, people would eventually take their belongings and leave. Then the scorpions would come out of their hidings and invade our homes laying the eggs, which has hatched, on our mattresses and chairs.

One time, my brother Ahmed asked me a very intriguing question: “Why are against the wall? It is surrounding Qalqilya from four sides making it impossible for any Israeli to harm you.”

He has a point. I will be safer in my four-sided bed in the middle of my four-walled room in my parents’ four-walled home in the four-walled Qalqilya canton. Safety should not come at the price of losing one’s freedom. I will not be able to go to Jenin to see my aunt, or Azzun to see my maternal grandmother, or Ramallah to read the Fatiha in front of the tomb of martyr-of-all-martyrs Abou Ammar, father of the nation.

Will I cope with the anaconda? Will I accept to crawl like a rat in the tunnel to reach Hable? I am a *habla* if accept to be a rat? To Camp Akianazioni I walked. Sounds of bullets. On the ground I fall. My eyes facing the direction of my family’s house. Ahmed running. Mother and father behind him. A car pulls next to me. Samir kneels down and holds my head between his hands. As death approaches, they are all around me. I look at them and utter my last words before losing consciousness:

“Nothing shall stay forever but the face of our Lord,

And I do not know of anything that is immortal.”

A first breath filled with the aroma of true freedom. Days later I wake up in a hospital surrounded by IDF officers. No sight of my family.