Lene Wold

*NO HONOUR IN CRIME (Ære være min døtre)*

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SAMPLE TRANSLATION

pp 11-17

It was one of those sweltering, noisy summer nights in Aqaba. The call to prayer echoed throughout the towers of the small Jordanian coastal city, located two hours south of the ancient city of Petra, the point on the map where Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia meet. The sound was drowned by the loud hum of the ceiling fan which whirred valiantly around to stave off the sweltering heat. I lay exhausted on the bed and stared at the repetitive circular motion.

Swish.

Swish.

I thought about the article I should finish writing. I had travelled to Jordan as a freelance journalist for the British newspaper *The Independent* after a brief stay in Lebanon. I was a newly graduated journalist and had been forced to leave the country after forty foreigners had been kidnapped which gave rise tofears that international journalists would be captured and beheaded. This was the beginning of the conflict in Syria in 2011, when such stories were still common daily occurrence and journalists regularly posted pictures and videos of our murdered colleagues. Therefore, the threat made a strong impression on me and I was driven to the airport fifteen minutes before the road was closed with burning tyres.

The realist in me had been frightened, but the idealist was still seeking to document human rights violations. I had to return to the Middle East, and promised both the newspaper and myself that I would travel back, and give a voice to those who are rarely heard, without putting myself at excessive risk.

As such, Jordan was the best option. It gave me indirect access to the conflicts in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the paper thin door to my room and asked me to open it. I was confused . This was the first time I had visited the country and didn’t know anyone so had no idea who the person on the other side of the door could be. An (unfamiliar?) man’s voice called my name.

"Who is it?" I asked, tiptoeing towards the door and trying to look through the crack in the woodwork. The man knocked harder and started turning the doorknob. I backed away.

"Open up!" he said, more aggressively. I realized that he intended to break in. There was no way out of the room andno one I could call for help. Contacting the front desk was not an option. What if he wasn’t alone? What if the men at the reception were involved? Where else could he have gotten my name from?

I considered climbing out of the window from the fourth floor, but it was already too late. The lock gave way and the door burst open. A man came in. As our eyes met, I understood what his intentions were.

I recognized him. He was a stocky, older man who had been following me all day. He had a grey beard, a pronounced nose, a stained shirt and big bushy eyebrows. I had noticed him when I walked past him by the vegetable market outside the city. He had examined me with eyes that could see right through the coat and hijab I had put on precisely to avoid such attention. He had howled, smacked his lips and whistled. I had looked away and ignored him, increasing my pace. I had thought that the feeling of him following me was just my imagination.

But there he was standing in my hotel room, undressing me yet again with his eyes. I tried to shut the door, but got it slammed so hard in my face that I fell backwards. Everything turned black. The taste of blood filled my mouth. I realized that it was going to turn ugly.

Just then, another guy with glasses and a black beard came in. He put his arm around the shoulder of the first man and spoke quietly to him. He then steered the man out of the room gently closing the door. They disappeared - without a glance, without a word.

I lay there waiting for them to return, looking at the closed door with the broken lock. I still had nothing to protect me. Blood dripped from my forehead when I stood up. The drops trickled down my skin and hit my toes. I took a deep breath, felt groggy and out of balance. I stood still for a few minutes before I cautiously opened the door and peered down the hallway. There was nobody there. I was alone. But the fear would not let go.

Following this experience I began to question things I had never considered before. What rights would I have had if I had been raped in Jordan that night? Could I have pressed charges with the police? Gone to the hospital and received help? Processed the event and talked about it with friends and family?

I searched for answers. I borrowed books. Acquired information. Discussed with imams, journalists, lawyers and organizations. Visited prisons, hospitals, families, burial sites.

The questions gave me unpleasant answers. For if I had come from a very conservative family in Jordan and been raped that night, my relatives would have just assumed that it was my own fault. I could have been killed to restore the family’s honour. I could not have pressed charges with the police, for that would have most likely been regarded as a breach of loyalty to family ties and to Islamic practice. I could have been sentenced for having extramarital sex. To go to court, I would have to have had four witnesses able to confirm the assault. Something I naturally would have been unable to provide. One seldom finds four witnesses to a rape.

I would not have been able to tell the hospital what had really happened for fear that they should report it to the police. Nor would I have said anything to friends or family about the incident. For by doing so, I would have brought shame upon myself and my family and given my relatives a legitimate reason to kill me. I would have violated the family honour. Especially if I had become pregnant as a result of the assault.

Even the legislation in Jordan indirectly allows such honour killings. A husband or close relative, who kills a woman because of honour, receives a reduced sentence according to Jordanian law. Penalties can range from three months to ten years. If my family had told the court that they did not want to be avenged for the death, which is normal in many similar cases in Jordan, the perpetrator would get a maximum of a few months in jail.

In other words, if I had been raped and killed in Jordan, the offender would have been imprisoned for no more than a few months. In fact, the odds of me ending up in prison were higher as women who are at risk of being killed by their family, are imprisoned to protect them against their own family members. It is part of the Crime Prevention Act of 1954, which gives the governors in Jordan legal power to keep a woman in so-called “Administrative detention” without charge or trial, if her release will provoke a crime taking place. With such detention one risks being incarcerated for up to a year, but many remain there indefinitely. Only the governor has the authority to determine whether the threat to the woman is reduced and that she can be discharged. Accordingly, the penalty is directly transferred to the victim for the intended crime. The women are imprisoned while the perpetrators go free.

I realized that in practice this means that there are an unknown number of women sitting in Jordanian prisons and doing time for a murder that never took place - a murder whereby they were meant to be the victim. It was a shocking realisation and became a turning point for the next four years of my life.

For when the stranger broke into my hotel room in Aqaba, I really felt that something was about to be taken from me. I felt that I had not been careful enough. That it was my fault that I had ended up in this situation and that I had been naive to travel to Jordan as a single woman. I felt the shame. I noticed how my integrity as a strong and independent woman was threatened. I felt it was my responsibility to protect my own body. As if it would have been my fault if this stranger had assaulted me.

The experience gave me a glimpse into what honour really is, and how it can be taken away from you. I realized that honour killings are much more complex than I had previously thought, and felt that I had a responsibility to examine the topic further. This time the story literally knocked on my door. For how can one justify honour killing?

It was a question that led me deep into the Jordanian culture, into closed prisons in Aqaba and through the endless desert of Wadi Rum. I pored through court documents and news archives for stories about honour killings from 1995 to 2014, and ended up making a list of 139 names. There were 139 women who had been shot dead, strangled with electrical cords, burned to death, beheaded with an axe, crushed with stones, driven to death or forced to drink poison. For such reasons as rape, immoral conduct, adultery, applying makeup or coming home late.

The stories were shocking, but I soon realized that it would not be among the victims I would find the answer to my question. Because only the perpetrators themselves can explain how they justify an honour killing. Only a father, who has killed his own child, knows what prompted him to do so. Only a brother, a mother or a sister who helped to kill one of their own, know what kind of thoughts they are left with afterwards. Therefore, I decided to go to the neighbourhoods where these women grew up. I would find siblings, fathers and mothers who had killed them, in order to ask them why.

The next few years I met men who were forced to kill their own mothers while they were still children, boys who were ordered to murder their sisters and husbands who proudly told how they tortured their wives to death.

There were many stories, but one stood out from all the others. I met Amina, who had survived an honour killing, and her father, Rahman, who took her sister’s life with several shots to the head. Their story was unique because I had the opportunity to hear both sides of the story.

Never before have I been as angry at someone as I have at Rahman. And never before have I been as sorry for someone, as I have for Rahman. Because, although he admits that he tried to kill both his daughters and managed to kill one, he acknowledges no responsibility for what he has done. On the contrary, he depicts himself as a victim of a subculture that puts honour above life. It baffles me. For if his action was for the sake of honour, one would expect him to be proud of what he had done. But, there is little trace of honour and pride in Rahman’s eyes. And his perspective has challenged my own prejudices. For when we talk about honour killings, women are usually portrayed as victims, men described as monsters, and Islam presented as the cause. I now know that it is a very misleading understanding of a practice that is extremely complex, and involves so many other issues. Honour killings have nothing to do with sharia, the Koran or Islam. It is about a culture that places honour above life, which we can challenge and change.

“What makes a father kill his own children?" I asked Rahman at the end of our conflicted conversations.

“How does one justify an honour killing?" I asked Amina the time we met in the desert outside Wadi Rum. Their responses resulted in this book.

Thanks for everything you have shared.

Pp 19-23

**In Her Red Shoes**

"I would’ve cut off your hands right there," he says, stroking his finger over my wrist before he smiles and stresses that it is exactly what he would have done if he had found out that I was with another girl. I look down at my wrist, the fingers, the ring, then into the dark brown eyes of the man before me.

"Why?" I ask. He looks at me, thinking before responding.

"Because you’d brought shame on the family. Because you deserved to die, or at least lose your hands.” Rahman Abdul Kadir, 64, puffs on a hookah and leans back. Amman's bustling streets outside. According to statistics 96 percent of the people passing by will agree with him. They believe that homosexuality is immoral, and 97 percent believe that the state should not accept homosexuality. I am an undesirable person in this country, because of my sexual orientation.

"Do you know anyone who is with someone of the same sex?" I ask. He looks up. "No!"  
"How do you know?" I ask, holding my coffee cup so hard my knuckles turn white.

"I'd have known it if I met an unbeliever," he says and adds "I would’ve seen it in the

eyes of the scum." He shakes his head in resignation.

"Yes. Inshallah - God willing," I reply and let my eyes rest on the minaret in the background. If I squint, the top of one of the towers looks like the little hat on the head of the old man. A killer with a minaret on his head, I think. He looks angry. I squirm in my chair. My shirt is still wet with sweat after running between security service offices earlier in the day. I have tried to obtain a permit to visit the Women's Prison in Amman, where his daughter Amina had been incarcerated. I think about how absurd the whole thing is. That she was imprisoned, while the man who tried to kill her went free.

I looked for him for over a year. Planned the interview for months. Hired the right contacts. Tried to speak to him through friends and acquaintances. I was about to give up when a message ticked in on my phone, and he wrote that he was willing to meet me. I had explained that I was working on a book about honour in Jordan. That I was interested in talking to him because he is well known in the neighbourhood for being an insightful man with considerable life experience.

To get an interview, I have lied in order to ensure my own safety. I have made up a husband and children in Norway. Refrained from telling anyone about my girlfriend. Those who have chosen a braver approach than I have are buried in the many graves in the cemeteries in Amman. They are placed there to be forgotten, but the nameless tombstones make it impossible to ignore that they once existed. The daughter of the man in front of me is one of them.

"It’s my responsibility to protect the family's honour," he says, and his chapped lips move diagonally upwards, while he gestures with his hands.

I shook his hand when I entered the café - greeted politely the person who would have killed me if I were his family, and cut off my wrists if he knew who I really was. Now the rough working hands fumble with the mouthpiece of the hookah. His right hand trembles uncontrollably. It had been a rough cut, I imagine.

He continues talking. I study his eyes, the smile lines, the bristly beard. I know he tried to kill both his daughters for more than thirty years ago. I wonder what compelled him to torture them while prayers rung out across the streets of Amman during the morning hours. Had he stood up a few hours before and drunk a strong cup of Arabic coffee? Looked in the mirror one last time, before he decided to kill his own children?

I've heard the youngest daughter's version of the story. Now I want to hear his.

"Tell me about your children," I say. "Tell me about your family, your clan, and your

home."

He looks at me. Opens and shuts his mouth. Then he fingers his beard and leans forward.

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**II**

**The Fig Tree**

It has already turned dark when my phone rings and a man who presents himself as Suleiman says he is waiting outside the hotel. I take one last look in the mirror. Ensure that the hijab covers every bit of my hair and that the makeup hides the bruises I got from my brutal encounter with the hotel door. I am still shaken by the experience, but have decided not to let it hold me back.

I put a hairspray - my makeshift self-defence weapon - in my pocket and activate the location services on my phone. Then I send a final message to my sister, as I have done many times in the past.

"I’m leaving the hotel now. Notify the Ministry if I haven’t sent a message by 9 am tomorrow."

I look out of the window, down at the car and write: "He’s driving a white Jeep." Then I add the registration number before I lock the door to my room.

The adrenaline is rushing through my body. I don’t know if I can trust the men I'm about to meet. I have only talked to one of them just a few times earlier. I told him that I wanted to write a story about honour killings. He said he could help me. He had contacts, both within the prison and the Ministry of Security, and would assist me as an interpreter and fixer if I wished. Of course I said yes. It did not take long before he made some phone calls and managed to track down a woman who was a survivor of an honour killing attempt. A woman who had spent most of her life in the Women's Prison in Amman to avoid being killed, and who was now living in hiding. How they knew about her, and where we were headed, they did not disclose. The only thing I knew was that she wanted to meet me somewhere in Wadi Rum – the desert near Petra - and that she would not give her real name.

I walk down the stairs to the ugly reception illuminated by blinding fluorescent lights, and decorated with a dark brown reception desk and a single computer that appears to have been there since the nineties. I leave my room keys and greet the men at the counter. I tell them that I will hopefully be returning in the morning. The receptionist reacts when I say that I will be gone all night and wonders if the men outside the hotel are waiting for me. I ask if he knows who they are, and whether there is any reason why I should not join them. The receptionist shakes his head and says he has not seen them before, but he believes that one of them works as a tourist guide to Petra. I take a look at the two men outside and ask him to remember their appearances in case I do not come back. He looks at me in wide-eyed astonishment.  
 "But what’re you going to do?" He asks.

"Work," I say and walk out the door. Outside I see the interpreter and a sturdy older man with a thick black moustache and an even thicker belly. He has a white and black chequered scarf tied around his head and a dark brown woollen jacket with a vest over his shoulders. The man greets me politely when I come out of the hotel.

"I’m Ahmed," he says, and welcomes me. He asks if I want to sit in the front or the back seat.

The interpreter greets me and bursts out laughing. I look at him trying to understand what he is laughing at. I've only met him a few times earlier and don’t know him personally.

"Have you put on a hijab?" He says, unable to stop laughing. "You’ve tied it all wrong."

I laugh too, partly because of his honest reaction and partly because of my own ineptitude, as I have just used a great deal of time trying to get it to look right.

"Maybe it’s a European way of tying it," says Ahmed and holds his hand over his mouth to suppress his laughter. We all laugh.  
 "Well, that's it," I say jokingly. I dry my laughing tears and open the back door. A cloud of dust emits from the beige leather seat as I sit down. The two men sit in front. The engine starts and a deafening noise fills the old car. Ahmed turns on the radio. Cheerful Arabic music drowns the din from the engine and echoes through the deserted streets. Ahmed turns onto the main road and says that we will first drive for a while by car and then walk a short distance that will bring us up into the mountains where the meeting will take place. He explains that the woman we are going to meet does not live there normally, but I am not allowed to know where we are going.

"It's too risky," he says, and I understand very well what he means. The Interpreter has already told me that the woman usually wears a niqab and stays at a secret address, because she is afraid that her family will again try to kill her.

"I understand that she has to be careful," I say, looking out of the dirty windows.

A country, one fourth of the size of Norway, hurtles past me. A country where Bedouins, Palestinians and Jordanians have lived for more than 8000 years and occasionally fought sporadic battles against occupiers, neighbouring countries and others. Several ground-breaking events in world history and human evolution have taken place precisely here. The area has been inhabited by numerous civilizations - some under the governance of famous leaders like Abraham, Saul and Pontius Pilate. Here we also find prehistoric villages from the Stone Age, cities you read about in the Bible, dating back to kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom. Allegedly, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, and Moses decided on his journey across Mount Nebo in Madaba. Furthermore, we find Roman fortresses, Crusader forts and the Nabataean capital Petra. The ruins of Petra are considered as one of the seven wonders of today, and show the outstanding agricultural technology, architecture, art and written language that were developed here.

However, although the area where Jordan is today has been home to one of the world's oldest cultures, the state of Jordan is rather young. It was first established in 1946, when the country gained independence from Great Britain, which had controlled the area once known as Transjordan after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Jordan has since its independence been the scene of numerous conflicts and wars. The country participated directly in two wars with Israel in 1948 and 1967, and has been deeply affected by the three Gulf wars that have been fought in the region (in 1980-88, 1991 and 2003). After the war with Israel in 1948, the population in Jordan increased from 400 000 to 1.3 million in one year, mainly due to refugees, which put a heavy strain on the country both politically and economically. Another issue that led to major unrests in the country was the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), who ran guerrilla activity from Jordan and Lebanon in the second half of the 1960s. The activity ended in a bloody civil war between the PLO and the Government, in September 1970, which was later called Black September. Although the organisation was expelled from Jordan after the Civil War, the group managed to carry out several spectacular terrorist operations in the country until 1974.

Since then, Jordan has repeatedly been on the brink of riots and unrest, exacerbated by the large numbers of Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Jordan has at present over half a million Syrian refugees. In addition, there are over two million Palestinian refugees registered in the country, which consist of 60-70 percent of the population. This creates very diverse demographics, which is further aggravated by the internal conflicts between resident Jordanians and Bedouins who for centuries have lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic life in the desert and the steppes.

Despite the difficult situation, Jordan is currently regarded as relatively stable. It is an oasis of peace in the Middle East, only protected by the uninhabited desert against the war that is unfolding on the border with Iraq and Syria in the north.

"It's hard to be a Bedouin in Jordan today," says the driver and turns down the volume on the deafening racket that has been blaring out of the radio. He says he belongs to the clan Bani Hasan - the largest Bedouin clan in Jordan, which consists of approximately one million people.

"So, you are also a Bedouin?" I ask.

"Yes, like forty percent of all Jordanians," he says and looks at me with a twinkle in his eyes in the mirror. "But the government makes it hard for us. King Abdullah is not fighting our cause." He continues and says that the Bedouins must pay taxes every time they cross the border now, which makes it expensive to live a nomadic lifestyle.

“Besides their goods are not worth much on the open market."

The interpreter turns towards me, interrupting us and asks if I have a phone or camera. I admit that I have a phone and a tape recorder with me, explaining that I need both.

He beckons with his fingers.

"Give it to me," he says, extending his hand toward me.

"Relax," says the driver. "She's writing about jarimat Sharaf - honour killings, not politics."

"Don’t be silly," the interpreter replies, "honour killing is politics. Everything is politics in Jordan. "

I look at the outstretched arm and realize that it will be awkward to refuse to hand over the equipment. The interpreter repeats once more that he wants to turn off the phone in order to prevent the authorities from following us. I rummage through my bag for the phone and hand it to him. He thanks me and immediately removes the battery from the phone.

"We don’t speak ill of King Abdullah in public," says the interpreter and puts the phone and the battery in the glove compartment.  
 "We don’t have to talk about King Abdullah," I say.

Ahmed says that it is not a problem.

"People are just a bit more cautious about what they say publicly nowadays. We’ve got problems here in the country, but to topple the regime like in Egypt and Syria? Never! Without a good option there is no reason to gather in the streets."

"Have many people demonstrated for women's rights in Jordan?" I ask trying to turn the conversation over to the subject we are here for. He thinks about it. Finally, he says that things have changed a lot in the last thirty years, and that women have gained back their respect.

"I remember my mother used to wear miniskirts and hot pants in the sixties and seventies. So did all her friends," he grins.

I am surprised. These days you will have a hard time finding miniskirts or shorts in the streets of Jordan. Now most women wear long coats and hijab. I would have felt very uncomfortable if I walked around in a miniskirt, even in the more modern parts of the city where the hipsters drink organic juice and listen to Arabic rap.

"Were women in Jordan more liberated thirty years ago?" I ask. "Nowadays they all use the hijab or burka. How come? "

"Because Islam has returned much stronger," he replies, and points out that the hijab is not necessarily synonymous with repression.

Essentially, I agree with him. Most women I know who wear the hijab say they have chosen it themselves and have not been forced by others.

"Islam has returned stronger because people are disappointed," the interpreter says, "disappointed that both the Western economics and politics have failed."

It is not difficult to understand what he is referring to. Jordan has for decades been among the closest allies of the USA and the West in the region, both economically and politically. From 1967, the situation in the country became very tense when Jordan lost the entire West Bank to Israel - which they had annexed in 1948 – with its rich agricultural areas and major tourist attractions during the Six Day War. The number of Palestinian refugees doubled, and some of the country's most important sources of income disappeared. Throughout the 1980s the situation deteriorated, and social unrest erupted in several cities. When Jordan then supported the UN sanctions against Iraq after the second Gulf War in 1990-1991, the aid from the Arab states stopped and the country was hit by a financial crisis. They became dependent on substantial foreign aid, particularly from the United States. It was a political crossroads that many Jordanians saw as a step towards more Westernisation, and the beginning of economic and moral decline. For numerous people in Jordan everyday life became harder, with higher unemployment and poorer living standards.

"So people in Jordan returned to religion and traditions when they felt that everything else had failed?"

"Yes," confirms the interpreter. "People lost faith that they could take control over their own destiny and decided to put it in Allah's hands instead."

It is an interesting point of view. Political parties in Jordan were first allowed in 1992 and the main party that emerged was the Islamic Action Front, which is linked to the Islamist movement the Muslim Brotherhood. This movement works primarily for reforms that support a conservative Islamist society, and is the largest Islamic organisation in the world, although it is banned in several countries and branded as a terrorist organisation. Economic discontent and political instability must have provided fertile grounds for more radical voices such as this. It may be one of the reasons that Islam has made a comeback so quickly, not only in Jordan but throughout the Middle East

“Does this mean that the women’s liberation has backlashed in Jordan?" I ask.

The two men discuss between themselves. Ahmed believes that women’s rights in Jordan are in general okay, while the interpreter totally disagrees. He points to the practice of honour killings and that the vast majority of victims are killed by their own brothers or fathers. And that one cannot say that the women have rights in a country where they are shot and killed by their own family members.

"What have they done to deserve this punishment?" He asks. "Been raped? Walked with a stranger on the way home from school? Or been caught in other so-called immoral behaviour? "

"It's not usual to kill someone for those kinds of minor things," says Ahmed.

"Of course it is," the interpreter says heatedly. "I read in the paper about a woman who was kidnapped and raped. When she was returned to the family the mother begged the rapist to marry her daughter in order to retain the family honour."

He tells that the man accepted the offer, and married the woman, but he divorced her after two years and "delivered" her back. When they found out that the woman was pregnant, the family became enraged and decided to kill her. Her sister and her brothers forced her into a car and drove her far into the desert outside Tafileh, where they took turns chopping her to death with a meat cleaver and to beat her to death with a rock. The autopsy report revealed that the woman was six months pregnant.

"But it's not something most Jordanians would have done," says Ahmed.

"They got seven years in prison for chopping their sister to pieces," said the interpreter. "They would’ve been given only a few months if they hadn’t admitted that they had planned the murder in advance. It says something about the attitudes in this country."

I commented that seven years is actually an unusually long prison sentence as far as honour killings are concerned, referring to a case from 2009 in which a 17-year-old brother stabbed his 13 year old sister and repeatedly trampled on her head until she died because she had received a phone call from a strange man.

"He got four months in prison," I say.

"That's what I mean," said the interpreter. "The judicial system in Jordan oppresses women."

Ahmed shakes his head, but says no more.

I sit and watch the road that winds through the desolate landscape. The sky is cloudless and the moon illuminates the mountains that surround us in the distance. It strikes me that within this open landscape, are the origins of Jordan's cultures and traditions and I wonder how widespread honour killings really are, and why they are often carried out in such brutal manner.

We drive a few hours more. First on the paved main road along the Dead Sea from Aqaba to Amman, then over to a narrower dirt road that gets worse and more potholed for each mile we put behind us. Finally we come to the end of the road. At the point on the map where the road suddenly just ends. A dead end into the void.

Ahmed stops the car and turns off the lights. We sit in silence for a while before the interpreter turns to me and says that I cannot follow the road anymore. I look at him in amazement and say that I really have no idea where we are, besides strictly speaking there is no road to follow.

"Get out of the car," he says sternly and opens the door.  
I look at Ahmed who winks at me, and I do as requested. I open the door on my side and feel the cool night air on my face. It is a starlit and crispy evening. The dry air of the desert produces both extreme heat and cold, resulting in widely fluctuating temperatures between day and night.

"Put this on," says the interpreter and hands me his scarf. "Cover your eyes."

I look at him. Presumably with a sceptical look, he smiles soothingly and explains that I don’t need to know where we are going, and that this is the only way to ensure it. I accept the scarf and try to hide the uncertainty growing inside me.

"I don’t know," I say and look desperately around me "is this really necessary?"

"We trust you," he replies leaning on the car, "and you trust us."

I consider his brown eyes and curly hair. I look at Ahmed and my own reflection in the car window. Then I tie the scarf over my eyes with trembling hands. When I look down, I can barely make out my own feet.

"Come here," the interpreter says, and takes hold of the scarf and spins an extra lap around my head so my feet disappear, and the only thing I can see is darkness. The fabric smells of eucalyptus and tobacco.

I feel the heat from my own breath radiate back from the fabric. In and out. Easy now. The situation is absurd, I think. Here I am standing with two strange men, in the middle of the desert in Jordan, where no one will ever be able to find me again, and my eyes are blindfolded. The interpreter puts his hand on my shoulder and I cringe.

"Relax," he says. "Get back into the car."

I find the car door with my hands and get in. Hear it close and the interpreter gets in beside me. I rummage through my pocket for the hairspray.

The car restarts and we begin driving off the bumpy road and onto the silky sand dunes, while the driver starts to sing a traditional song. The sound of his voice breaks the small contact I have with the outside world. My body bounces up and down and my head turns from side to side in rhythm with the violent movements. I have no idea when the big bumps approach and sit tensely, in full alert. I grip the front seat, trying to protect my head. I am prepared for anything. A jump. A touch. A breath. Or the next refrain of what feels like an endless song. All my senses are heightened, and it feels like a strange dream.

"Can I remove the scarf soon?" I ask and hear the interpreter snigger at my comment.

"Soon," he says, and we drive at least an hour before the car finally stops and Ahmed says that we have arrived. I remove the blindfold, exit the car and look across. I breathe in the fresh air. The landscape seems endless. Only the black shadows of the mountains around us make a distinction between earth and heaven. A complete lack of confinement, in stark contrast to the prison cell in which the woman we are about to meet has spent a big portion of her life.

Ahmed and the interpreter get out of the car and we walk in silence towards one of the mountains where I barely discern a tent. A figure is standing outside and waiting. The mountainsides around us consist of only stones, pebbles, boulders, sand. Specks of dust. Mile after mile. Nothing lives here, the landscape is dead, Ireflect, trying to gather my thoughts and sort out the questions I have in my head.

When we get closer to the tent, I see that the figure outside is an elderly man, with a bent posture and the passage of time etched in his face. He wears a dark grey robe and appears to be well over seventy years. Eagerly, he gesticulates with his arms, waving them back and forth to attract our attention.

"Salaam alaykum," he says. "Hello. Hey, hey."

The big smile reveals a mouth missing almost all its teeth. We greet in return and the interpreter and I are guided into the tent. Ahmed and the old man stand outside chatting and smoking. Immediately my eyes catch the eyes of the strange woman. They are dark green and framed by a black niqab. She sits among large burgundy coloured pillows on a mattress in front of a fire crackling in the middle of the tent. She looks straight at me, without blinking. I notice that one eye is not focussing.

"Salaam alaykum", I say as I walk up to her and extend my hand. She gets up, reaches out her hand and greets back in a gentle voice.

"Wa ‘alaykum al-salaam" followed by something in Arabic which I do not follow.

"Just sit down," says the interpreter and plops down on a mattress on the opposite side of the tent.

"Call me Amina, I've always liked that name," he translates.

"Amina is a nice name," I say.

The smell of sweet tobacco seeps through the thin canvas. We sit there looking at each other in silence. Even the niqab that covers her face is unable to hide the abuse she has been through. One eye lacks focus, and above the nose I can discern a deep scar. We are both aware that this might be our only meeting. Neither she nor I belong in this landscape. Every journey she makes entails an increased safety risk. She must not attract attention.

"Is it okay if I record the interview?" I ask, and take the notepad and tape recorder out of my bag. She nods and the interpreter explains to her that the recording will be used only by me, and never shared with anyone else. She looks understandingly at me.

"Where do I begin?" She asks gently.

"Begin where it started," I reply.

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"What?" the mother said. "What did you say that dirty sister of yours is doing?" Her voice trembled. Amina looked at her in shock. She had not expected her mother to react that way. Not so aggressively. Not so forcefully. The mother grabbed Amina's hands and pulled her, trying to yank her towards the living room door.

"No!" Amina said. "Not now. Not here. Not in front of everyone!"

Her mother raised her finger towards her. Amina saw how her whole hand shook in anger.

"Go get your sister! Get her! Take her down to the beach. Don’t you dare do anything else!"

Amina swallowed. She regretted it so deeply. So stupid of her to have thought that this would go smoothly. That her mother would understand. She was the most traditional of them all. She nodded obediently. Yes, understood. She would bring Aisha to the beach.

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"Al-Aqaba Prison" it says on the ugly building. In the days following the meeting in the wilderness, I have visited several of the local police stations in search of women in the same situation as Amina. I want to find documentation, which can confirm her story. At first I had trouble believing parts of what she told me, especially that part about the preventive legislation measure, whereby women are incarcerated in order to protect them. No laws could be constructed in this manner, I thought. Nevertheless, a few days later I sat there with the wording of the legislation in my hands and had to admit that Amina was right. In Qanon Mana Al-jraim 1954 - the Crime Prevention Law of 1954 - it stated that governors in Jordan have the legal authority to keep a woman in "administrative detention" without the case being reviewed by a court, if her release will cause a “crime taking place." In a study of the law it was further explained how the exact paragraph - originally intended to detain a would-be perpetrator - was manipulated in order to oppress women. Consequently, the penalty was transferred directly to the victim of the potential crime.

I have never heard of a regulation that is so discriminatory, nor have I heard a story that is so provoking. I made some inquiries around in Aqaba to find out whether locals had heard about other women who are imprisoned to prevent them from being killed for honour. Most reacted negatively as soon as I mentioned the word honour. Such women from around here are first sent to the Aqaba prison, where men and women serve time together, before being placed in the Jwaideh women's prison in Amman, I was told. ‘Proper women’ are at home with their families, they emphasised.

It was perhaps to a prison such as this that Amina had been sent a few days after her attempted murder. It was here she spent her first nights behind bars, where the decision that she should be kept in custody for her own safety was taken. It is where she went in as a free person and came out as an outlaw.

I want to find evidence for what she has told me. Although it is many years since Amina was in prison, the police must surely be able to confirm her story. There must be some kind of a logbook, statistics or official documentation. I look up at the dilapidated entrance of the prison, secured by a solitary guard with a rusty machine gun. Well, maybe logging is not the best here, I think, but it is worth a try.

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Translation by Caroline Babayan

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