



MYM LITERATURE

Hitting Home

by Mariam Al-Kalby

Where Muslims come home to reflect

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When I was young, I remembered living in an old house.

It was where my little brother first caught the chicken pox and then passed it on to me and my other younger brother. It was where I was forced to sit on a wooden chair and eat bananas, even though I've never been able to swallow one bite since my Gerber food days. It was where I lost my first goldfish, Fifi, and had to watch my mother lead the way – holding Fifi in a spoon – as we then watched it spin down the toilet. It was where I would wake up at Fajr time, come down the carpeted steps, and make my way to the kitchen. I'd meet my father there and watch him as he would get ready to go to work and smile at me on his way out.

There were memories hanging on the walls, stories drifting in the morning air, and voices lingering on furniture. This quaint house had a slice of my childhood and she was going to be taken away.

Because I was so young, I don't remember what exactly happened, but what I do recall is that we had to leave her and move. I remember my parents shaking their heads, saying something about 'them' and a restaurant.

Now that I think about it, I had always found it weird that our house was right beside a Chinese restaurant. Growing up, my brothers and I would race on the rocky path in the backyard leading to the crooked garage, and smell Asian food wafting in the air.

The street we lived on and the surrounding area were essentially all commercial; only our house and the odd home here and there proved to be the exception. I knew there had to be something behind why we didn't have any neighbors, or why we couldn't play near the traffic-laden streets.

Eventually, we moved out and found another place. It was hard, but to avoid all of that commercial pressure, it had to be done. However, even as the years tumbled by, my heart remained connected to that home. The memories continued to haunt those walls, until finally, when 'they' came to demolish it. I just remember standing there – as if I was watching a silent film – as the tractors noisily came and tore our home down. I quietly watched as she was jabbed in the stomach, in the head, and finally in the heart.

I saw the pink wallpaper bend in pain as it was being torn. I saw the one toilet in the entire house stand alone, looking as though it was being exposed and unveiled. I saw the roof break and eat dust.

Once in a while, I return back to what was once our home, and realize. This was but a sip of the poison that many Muslims are forced to drink regularly in their lives, as they helplessly watch their homes and livelihoods being stripped away from them under the pretense of money and national security. My sadness for losing my own home was incomparable to what many Palestinians and other Muslims have to perpetually endure as they watch their lives crumble and surrender into the dirt.

Where we lost a physical house, my brothers and sisters are losing their homes, their families, and their lives. Where we found another sheltered home, my Ummah suffers to search for another one to live under. Where I feel upset to see a drive-thru in place of my old house, my Muslim brethren feel crushed to see their houses being replaced by other buildings, fences, and barricades.

There is hope however. It might be small – a grain of rice, or a speck of salt. But there is hope.

I found it in the face of an old woman. Nestled in a massive garden of trees and entangled plants as knotted as the strings of time, an older lady lived by herself in a house of a home close to our old residence. It was like moving through a forest to get to her front door. And when we would get there, we would be greeted with a smiling wrinkled face. A face displaying all the roadmaps of her life: love, heartache, loss, and hope.

Where we waved the white flag, this old lady refused to leave. They came knocking on her door, they entered her house, they taped notices to her front door, and they offered her money. She did not falter. With her garden of her own making as her protection, she waited it out.

To this day, I hear she is still putting up a fight. She said she wouldn't leave until the day she died.

I can only pray that her home is never suffocated from the dust of other's destruction, that she still stands, straighter, higher, and stronger than any other building on the block.