

Peyton Sammons

Prof. Tony David

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They Call Her Hercules

When Faiza was first born, her parents smiled with glee after the long and painful process. They knew exactly what they were going to name her before she even entered this world. Her mother wanted a daughter who was victorious and since she planned on having more children after Faiza, she wanted her to set a good example for her younger siblings in the future. Neither Faiza's mother nor father knew just how victorious she would be in life, but they didn't support her victory. That's where the story truly begins.

Faiza had been silently sneaking out her front door since she was fifteen years old. She was desperate to feel a connection with the real world. At home she was suffocated by religion and old traditions, something that kids her age were shying away from and she couldn't help herself from doing the same thing. Unfortunately, for Faiza that decision was only consecrated when she came home and told her parents that she was sexually harassed.

"Well what do you expect when you don't wear a hijab? Keep your head down and don't make eye contact with men. The problem will solve itself," her father spoke, anger booming through his low voice. Who knows, maybe her father gawks at girls her age too but keeps it a secret. After that incident, Faiza had a poor relationship with her family. They barely spoke to each other, her father hoping that the silent treatment would make her change her mind, but she was bull headed. Nothing changed with the family drama in the future, it was almost like they pretended she didn't exist anymore. But Faiza didn't argue that night, just shook her head and

went to her room. At that time she didn't see the point in creating a heated debate at sixteen years old.

"How disgusting," she thought. That's when Faiza had an epiphany. Later that night, as she helped her younger sisters with their homework, she realized that she had to make a change some way or somehow. Sure, she could take the heat, but she would never wish something like that on her sisters. It was her time to join the movement that had been happening for years.

Faiza hunted the internet for a place to start, scouring through Facebook and Instagram before stumbling upon a group that was hosting a sit-in on National Women's Day in Rabat. She couldn't deny the giddy feeling that filled her core. She hunted through the page, searching for the location, time, and how many people were going, before texting her best friend, Nadia. The only problem was that she would have to lie to her parents and she wasn't the best liar, but that would soon change for her. She wrote up a draft of a permission slip for a school trip to Rabat to visit the zoo and a guided tour of the city. They didn't blink twice before signing it for her. Then everything fell into place.

When both the girls arrived at their first peaceful protest, it was like a fire ignited in their cores. Faiza felt like she was hanging out with her family while she was yelling for justice and equality. All the women there that day had everything in common with her. When Larim, one of the women in charge, shouted into the megaphone, an emotion flooded through Faiza that she had never felt before.

"We want women all over Morocco to know that what we have now is not enough. This protest is meant to remind the people in power and those without power that MORE needs to be done!" Larim shouted into the megaphone.

Her voice seemed to dance around Faiza's brain, echoing in and out of each ear. That was the beginning of Faiza's career. From there she traveled to fourteen more protests before the age of eighteen. Lies would tumble out of her mouth without even thinking about them. Instead of going to protests she was suddenly going to sleepovers, a Quran study group, and apparently multiple school trips: all things that her parents approved of at the time. Not all the protests were peaceful. Sometimes they got out of hand and violence would break out with the police depending on the topic they were protesting for, but she never ran, never budged. She always stood strong.

She led a protest for the first time when she was seventeen. When the television news was flooded with the story of the case on Hajar Raissouni, Faiza was outraged. If she was home alone she probably would have screamed. Should women not be able to make their own decisions? How dare they not believe her? When were things ever going to change? Grasping for her phone, she messaged as many people she could about the Moroccan journalist and created her own protest. When people arrived she passed out signs with Hajar's face adorning them with painted words written across the bottom.

"Justice For Hajar Raissouni"

After leading her first protest, starting the call and response chants that filled the barren street, she became hungry. Hungry to overthrow the patriarchy. She began gaining respect online through all the hard work she put forth to organize her protests. It was the first time Faiza ever felt proud of herself. When her little sister turned fifteen later that year, she came and sat on Faiza's bed hesitantly.

"I want to do what you do. I want to come to the next protest with you. I'm sick of just sitting here and not speaking out," the young girl blurted out.

“Adilah it’s too dangerous,” Faiza answered honestly.

“But you do it all the time Faiza. You started when you were younger than me. So why is it any different?” Her voice was full of naivety and innocence.

“Fine, you can go to the next march with me, but it’s going to be soon. Do your research before you go, you need to learn about Khadija’s rape case. It’s brutal and disgusting so be careful on the web,” Faiza responded to her sister, sighing in defeat. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to expose her sister to the reality of the world, especially this young. There was always risk with a protest, but hopefully Adilah would only attend peaceful ones until she aged. But she couldn’t argue with her. They were sisters after all and they were both just as stubborn as their parents.

When it was time for them to leave the following week, Faiza was running around like a madwoman. She was packing water and nuts, various different snacks, as she was unsure of how long the protest would actually last. Finally wrapping up her posters and throwing them at Adilah, they left the small house without a single goodbye to their parents. It was nothing new, the same drama but a different day with that family.

As they walked down the streets of Tangier, other women about the same age met up. You know the famous saying, strength in numbers, yes that applies to the streets of Morocco as well. Faiza’s courage grew as more women surrounded her, giving her the strength she needed to lead the rally. She became giddy with excitement and anticipation but her fears were creeping up on her. This was the largest protest she had been responsible for and she didn’t want anything to go badly. For her this was one of the most important topics yet.

The group of women walked their way to the Grand Socco right outside the medina opening in Tangier, where they could line up and circle around the enormous fountain that stood

in the middle of it all. It was the perfect scenery and was a busy place where hopefully they would catch people's attention. As Faiza glanced around, she could not find herself happy with the turn out. There needed to be more bodies, more individuals with something to fight for, because this was simply not enough. At first they all started the protest like they did in Rabat, simply sitting down and holding their signs that covered various different topics on women's rights. Some commented on Khadaji's case, others talked about the pay gap, while the rest covered an overall theme of equality.

Faiza paced impatiently while she waited for more friends to arrive. In about thirty minutes, the park was full and Faiza felt relieved. There were maybe fifty or so women there to participate which made her ecstatic. She knew that twenty voices could be hushed by the busy sounds of the streets, but fifty was nearly impossible to keep quiet. There was a rush of adrenaline that filled her veins as she joined the rest of the bodies by sitting on the ground. She was antsy to get to the real show, but this would have to be enough for now. Her first goal was to draw attention to the park without being disruptive just yet.

Her plan quickly fell into place. When she first picked this location, she was unsure of it, but she soon learned that it was a huge tourist attraction for outsiders. She watched as people sat outside Cinema Rif drinking coffee and others tried bargaining with men trying to sell things on the streets. Faiza thought that if she could attract their attention then they could return to their homeland and speak about the injustice that women face everyday in Morocco. She was unsure if the second half of her plan would work, but people from Spain and America came up to read their signs. Some of the tourists even sat down to join them even though not all of them could communicate or read their signs. It was like the energy that day was just readable and Faiza soaked up every minute of it.

For the first hour, all the women including Faiza were silent. It was a symbol for the amount of repression and violence they all received at one point in their lives. Some began silently weeping while the others remained stone faced, almost seeming that they were forgetting to blink. The environment had become eerie with each passenger that walked by and the women were becoming antsy.

As Faiza could feel their energy intensify, her brain flooded with everything she learned while scouring the internet endlessly each night. It was better than school for her and where she learned most things about women's rights -- or lack there of -- besides serious cases like this one on the news. Everything that was aimed at her and other women all their lives made her blood boil. Every law made against her fueled her anger and it started to ebb towards her brain as she picked up that megaphone. Her sister gave her a hesitant look before she clicked the button, noticing the crowd that was starting to grow over her one subtle action. Faiza watched a police man nearby walk the outskirts of the protest, but she wasn't fearful. There wasn't much they could do since her plan was for it to be peaceful.

"We deserve equality!" she yelled through the contraption. "And we deserve it now!" Her call out was followed by agreements from the various other women. Faiza noticed the police walk closer to the sit-in. His eyebrows raised in surprise and Faiza was confused as he started walking quickly towards the group. She craned her neck to look back and a gasp fell to her lips. There was a group of women standing next to each other at the front with their original signs turned around. A picture of the king decorated them with words denouncing him at the body. She always saw the words "Women Supporting Women" float around her social media, so Faiza didn't think twice when she stepped in front of the officer, practically pushing him away. He bounced back with a snarl.

“What is this? Did you put this together? Is this the message you want to put out to everyone? This is against the law,” he shouted. She started to tremble a little and soon that infamous phrase about women was quickly diminished. She could hear them shouting and turned to see them pointing at her.

“Yes, officer, she's completely in charge. She told us how to make these posters and what to put on them. We didn't want to come!” one of the women exclaimed. All the loyalty and faith she had in this protest was erased and she was pushed to the ground. Confusion filled her head, as she was unable to understand why the blame was being completely pushed on her. Perhaps they were too scared to take their own, but why here of all people. It felt like everything was happening in slow motion as her hands were being pulled behind her back. She could hear her sister pleading with the officer, trying to reason and tell him the truth but it was to no avail. Between her own tears, Faiza kept saying that everything was going to be okay, mouthing reassuring words while her thoughts were muddled. Faiza felt as if she blacked out against that cold concrete but her sister's pleas kept her somewhat conscious. This felt like the worst betrayal anyone could experience and she wondered if this is how she made her parents feel as well.

Before Faiza could finish counting to ten, she was lifted off the ground and dragged to a nearby police car she missed earlier. She knew that if her family wasn't poor, she could have bribed the police to let her go and explain that it was all just a misunderstanding. She would have been able to run back and embrace her sister in a comforting hug, but her lack of knowledge on the prison and court system stirred a different fear. She didn't know how all this stuff worked, I mean she was still a kid, so you can't entirely blame her when she feared this might be the last

time she saw Adilah. Of course, that was a foolish thought, but at the time Faiza was only thinking of worst case scenarios.

When the car pulled away from the crowd, she felt somewhat accomplished up until that point. Even though her protest had caused a disturbance, she knew it made people listen to what she had to say, maybe they read the signs that were more important than denouncing the king, maybe they saw the overall purpose behind the initial protest. She watched the group of women soon look like lost sheep without their shepherd as their bodies became smaller and smaller. But before they completely disappeared, she saw Adilah walk up to the group of women and yell in their faces before they fled the scene. Deep down Faiza knew that this would soon be broadcasted on the news and she was fearful of how the story would be told.

She was dragged out of the car, practically by her hair when she was led inside. No one gave her a second look, some muttering under their breath about her absence of her hijab and others already speaking of the public disturbance. She couldn't help but chuckle about the naivety behind their hushed words. It was replaced with a smirk when she realized her actions got under all these men's skins. When she was thrown into the small cell until further questioning, a laugh fell from her lips. *How did she get here?* She thought to herself. This was not the plan and now she was surrounded by concrete, alone with her own thoughts. Her brain struggled between feeling successful and feeling like a failure. Faiza became hysterical at that point until her hysteria drifted her off to sleep.

Some hours later in the day, she was awoken by a familiar voice. Her eyes blinked away the sleep that was coating them but quickly became confused when she remembered her whereabouts. How could she hear her sister speaking to her? Worry began to run through her veins as she feared that her sister was also arrested that day, something that was never her first

wish for Adilah. She became confused as she glanced around the small four by four cell, but soon found the location of the voice.

There, on the television, was Adilah. Her face filled the screen with a news caption underneath about the protest that day. There Adilah was being interviewed rather intensely on the actions that occurred that day but her demeanor was strong in front of that camera. She stood tall with her chin up in the air, looking about five years older than she really was as her voice echoed around the empty room.

“Today shows how important it is for young girls to start making a stand. This incident was a huge misunderstanding and now it is covering the truth behind Faiza’s real words. The focus here is our rights. There needs to be change and there needs to be change now. My sister never gave up and I hope this shows how courageous she was for this movement. Please get involved,” her sister spoke so confidently.

Tears welled up in her eyes as pride filled her bones. Faiza had never felt like this before, but for the first time in her life, she finally felt victorious.

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