

“What if...”

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The Only Way

She sat silently in the corner of the room, her hands tucked neatly into her lap, the weight of the world pressing down on her thin shoulders. The guests filled the house with laughter and chatter, but she heard none of it. Her mother’s voice echoed in her head: *“This is the only way, my daughter. The only way we survive. The only way we are respected. The only way we are safe.”* This is the only path to freedom.

She was just sixteen.

They said he was a good man. Educated. From a good family. Older, yes—but that was never something to complain about. Older men knew how to lead, how to provide. *“You’ll learn to love him,”* they said, as if love could be summoned like obedience.

Her grandmother had done the same. Her mother too. Women in her family didn’t choose—they adapted. It was never about what they wanted. It was about preserving family honor, following the path carved out for them by generations before. She could hear the voices of the women from the past generations, echoing through the room: *“don’t break our tradition”*

She looked at him. Everything she knew about democracy, women rights just faded away.

He stood confidently, surrounded by men who slapped his back in celebration. His eyes met hers for only a moment. There was no warmth, no curiosity—just possession. Like she was something handed over, not someone with a beating heart.

But she smiled. Because that’s what good girls do. That’s what daughters are taught: smile, obey, survive. In our world, we do not marry for love but for survival. We do not know what the word love means, it does not even occur in my memory. Even if I dug deep into my brain, I cannot find the word or the meaning behind it.

Inside, she screamed.

No one heard.

Yet in that silence, a small seed was planted. One day, she would tell this story—not to curse her past, but to understand it. To explain to her own daughter that once, women



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were taught marriage was the only way. That freedom came in quiet rebellions, in unspoken dreams. This was her path to pass down the word love and freedom to her future ones. That life has a more meaning and that marriage is not the only path to freedom.

And that maybe—just maybe—she’d be the last in the line to marry because she *had to*, not because she *wanted to*.



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