

Prologue

'Azmeer !' she screamed, 'Help me !' as her pristine face now stained with a vile mixture of blood and tears hid from the approaching terrorists.

Wasn't he the one who would keep him safe, as screams of pain threatened to ruin her state of oblivion.

She shuffled behind a wall but she knew it was only a matter of time ; she stared at her childhood home, brutally destroyed by the Taliban. Azmeer used to tell her that the phenomenon of just thinking of that person would make them appear ,she had always ridiculed this theory with science but at this moment Sabrina looked up at the heavens and prayed. He didn't appear, he wasn't going to.

The documents that would tear this tyrannous regime apart were hidden under her shirt, years of digging up evidence was all going to go to waste as blood flowed from her gun wounds but now she was immune to pain as thoughts of Azmeer flooded her mind. He was a Hazara and he lived in a cave overlooking the hills. She reminisced about the times where they lay together, their bodies the only form of warmth that sheltered them of the cruel winter nights of Afghanistan. Their love was a crime, she being a Pashtun, but she didn't care . They finally had enough information to overrule their government, one of corruption and greed. They were going to stop the ruthless executions, bombs that had reduced the country to a dystopian hell which no citizen could escape.

A masked man sneaked behind the corner, certain he had seen the target. He was almost mesmerised by her beauty but his parents' life were at stake. He had orders to take her alive where she would be tortured until Azmeer was caught and then they would be beheaded publicly, a warning for the rest of the nation. He ran over to Sabrina, her stone-cold face bereft of emotion, he took her by the hair as she kicked him but to no avail. She bit his hand and then he had enough, slapping her twice making her whimper in pain. 'If you do anything more, you won't be here anymore.' He hissed in her ear, his gun pointed at her luscious brown hair.

Azmeer ran, and ran as he searched for the only being who had truly ever understood him. This was all his fault he thought, he should have hugged her tighter, sheltered her from the atrocities of his so called nation. Sabrina had initially gone home to tell her parents that they were engaged and they were running away to Europe, a land that was

heaven in their eyes. From there they would slowly leak all the information about the government and hopefully change the course of Afghan history.'Aaaah,' he screamed as blood sprouted from his body. Maybe this was the bullet, the shot that would finally pierce justice in the heart.

Chapter 1

Sabrina climbed onto her father's lap as she gazed at her six brothers playing football, their hair swaying in the wind as they sprinted up and down the street. 'Ugh, Baba why can't I play with the boys?' Sabrina whined as her chocolate covered eyes stared into her father's cold, dark ones.

'You're too pretty to be playing with the boys Asal.' Akhtar soothed as he stroked his little girl's name. He was one of the Pashtun leaders and this provided him enough political clout and money to thrive in the nation.

'Akhtar they're here,' Yasmin, his wife, said as she welcomed them in and gestured for them to sit. They never sat as usual, their faces hardened by war seeking to whelme all emotion possible. They greeted him in the traditional Afghan way and they deposited five huge bundles of cash in his hands and left without any words spoken

'Baba why do they give you so much money but nobody else has money?' Sabrina asked as she played with the gold chain on his neck and laughed when he burped.

'Asal, only some people deserve money. Why don't you go play with the girls over there.' he said as he gestured towards the clique of girls which Sabrina despised.

‘But Baba,’ she whined but she knew that her father’s word was her command as he walked gingerly towards Ameena, the unofficial leader of the clique. She sashayed towards Sabrina, her eyes wrinkling with disgust, as she stared at Sabrina’s dirty legs.

‘Well I guess Ms Ugly has joined us.’ She mocked but before Sabrina could retaliate she saw blood gushing from Ameena’s back as a group protesting against the Pashtun reign marched through the city. They saw Sabrina and slowly walked up to her, their faces gleaming as one of them slowly choked her. Sabrina screamed but her parents were inside and everyone else stood shell shocked as they watched the terror unfold. Suddenly a rock pierced the eye of the person who was choking Sabrina causing him to lose grip as he fell in agony. Another barrage of rocks flew across the sky making the rebels fall. Sabrina sprinted away, her legs no stranger to the thorns and rocks of the Kabul streets.

“Baba, Baba !” she shouted and as her father rushed out of the house, his revolver buried in his back pocket as always. He noticed the marks on Sabrina’s neck, patches of red invaded her pure-white skin, and then he saw the rebels. He cocked his gun and shot each of them, his military like precision ensuring certain death for each of his targets. As Akhtar carried her beloved daughter home she saw his saviour, a short statured boy with a mischievous grin, he winked and put his tongue out. He then juggled his marbles making Sabrina giggle and as she went inside she felt a tingle of something she had never felt.

But then it hit Sabrina as Yasmine cried and kissed her only daughter over and over while Akhtar shouted at Pashtun groups over the phone, his face glowering with rage. Sabrina trembled as she failed to comprehend the last few minutes. Flashbacks of the scene tortured her 13 year old soul as she sobbed, tears dripping from her cheeks. She looked down at her shirt, some of Ameena’s blood splattered on it and there was nothing she could do as she wept into her mom’s arms.

Chapter 2

Azmeer sat on the edge of the hills overlooking the town, holding the marbles as he looked out into the city. Both his parents had been brutally executed for protesting the Pashtun rule and now he lived with his eighteen year old brother Salim and their ex-military dog Captain. Salim had always believed in the value of education ; drilling knowledge into his younger brother even when he resisted. Salim aspired to become an undercover spy and rupture the links which bonded the government , military and the

Taliban. Remarkably, Afghanistan had never been convicted of military crimes by international courts and Salim suspected that there were criminal links between different countries who were united by the Taliban.

Azmeer was an innocent fourteen year old whose emerald eyes had seen too much, his parents being cut up to death when he was just 6, his eidetic memory no aid in this principle. However his mind was flooded with thoughts of the porcelain skin of Sabrina, her deep eyes, and the smile which still made his petite body shudder in a flurry of emotions he couldn't comprehend. He smiled as he reminisced her smile imprinted in his brain,

Salim came out of their cave, his face glowering with rage as he slapped Azmeer. 'Did you interrupt a Hazara raid Azmeer? He shouted as Azmeer turned around his expression unchanged as he stared into the eyes of his brother. That was almost one of the most successful raids but you spoilt it.'

Azmeer, the depiction of calm, as his gaze permanently fixed in his brother's eyes. 'You taught me about peace and how the Taliban ruined it, why do we do the same? It's your fault for killing children when they do not seek to do anything' he said as he walked away.

'This is different,' argued Salim, his argument tumbling as Azmeer smiled at him while playing with Captain. Luckily for Azmeer nobody had spotted him as if they had death would have been a certainty. He played with his hair as he thought about freedom. They had initially thought about taking Sabrina hostage in return for important documents and information which could have paved a way for obtaining a hint of control in the nation but that path was no longer viable. He reflected on what Azmeer said, was this really the right way? Salim was well accustomed with the revolutionary ideas of famous philosophers but the saying 'An eye for an eye' was engraved in his mind. One moment had completely transformed his life, when Salim was ten he naively approached the Afghan military and asked for books so he could learn. In return they kicked his little body around and threw beer bottles at him until he almost bled to death. But an American nurse rescued him and treated him, he remembered her soft hands and as he sobbed in agony. She leant closer and whispered

'An eye for an eye,' That was the only words the nurse ever told him but she gave him probably the most powerful weapon he could ever own ; knowledge, She stole books from the American library and as she tousled his hair she gave them to him. She kissed his cheek and shielded him as he ran home to the only place he ever felt safe in

The sky was pitch black as the brothers lay down looking up as the stars illuminating the night as à candle to à room. The city was silent,one of the only times serenity took over the city and as Azmeer closed his eyes the image of Sabrina lulled him to sleep as he curled up next to the fire.

Chapter 3

Akhtar leant back into his chair as Sabrina was still being consoled by her mother. She was bound to experience it and he didn't fear her death. People in his opinion were just pawns who just guided him to more wealth. He had savagely murdered his brother and his family after the Taliban suspected them of helping the Hazara tribe. Akhtar thought that the sacred land of Afghanistan was polluted by tribes like Hazara ,Baloch and more of these people who he referred to as 'untouchables'. Afghanistan was the land of the Pashto and he would fight until all these creatures were eliminated and his country would be free from these filthy races. He opened his door and poverty surrounded him but that was the least of his concerns. Every month Pashtuns would come to his door and collect money and in return they would complete his dirty work. The task of eradicating his enemies and destroying religions which disgusted him. Christianity was à crime and any church or Christian organisation found in the nooks and crannies of the city would be bombed unmercilessly. Any Pashto family which refused to commit these acts of cruelty would be beheaded publicly,à sound warning to any other Pashtuns seeking to follow the righteous path.His sons went to à madrasa while he strictly prohibited Sabrina from any form of education. She was restricted to learning cooking, sewing and any other household activities. Àn educated girl was à dangerous weapon and after hearing the exploits of other female revolutionaries ,who had overthrown governments,Akhtar wasn't willing to risk his daughter going against him.

Sabrina trembled.She could see blood everywhere,Ameena's blood,she shivered in the summer day ; her diminutive body no match for what she had seen. She vowed revenge against Ameena's killers but what she did not know was her father's considerable role for her pain. Her mother helped her outside and set her down on one of the chairs around. Sabrina's skin glistened in the sun as she remembered his smile,the smile which saved her from her captors. Suddenly she heard à whistle,one she had heard before.She felt à slight tingle as she looked around and then she spotted his dusky face with the same playful smile which ignited à spark in à heart which had never felt this

rush of emotion. He gestured at her to come and his smile invaded her sense of logic as Sabrina ran towards him her luxurious, hazel hair falling on her eyes.

Azmeer's heart skipped a beat as he saw a type of beauty he'd never seen before, she came closer and closer and then he felt her fragrance wrap around him as she pulled him in for a hug. They stayed in the embrace for a few seconds, Azmeer befuddled on his next move but Sabrina pulled back and giggled at his shy face, the confidence which had always been emanated absent from his caramel skin.

Azmeer then stumbled back as he heard a gun shot, an involuntary action for him now but his senses took over as he clutched Sabrina's velvety hand, as she stood in shock. They ran, hand in hand, to Azmeer's cave as gunshots rained over the agonised town. As Azmeer sat Sabrina down, her face still traumatised, but as she came to her senses she remembered. Blood, Aameena, death and the noise of bullets still rang in her ear as a cruel reminder of what could happen to her, to anybody in fact. As she sobbed, her translucent skin now a scarlet colour he couldn't bear, Azmeer moved hesitantly towards her and enclosed her in a hug. He smelt her angelic hair, he moved closer telling her everything would be okay as Sabrina whimpered and fell asleep in his arms.

Azmeer touched the face of Sabrina as he stroked her hair but then he heard the footsteps of his brother. It was too late. Salim stepped into the cave and one quick glance at Sabrina was enough rage to charge at Azmeer letting out a blood curdling scream as he slapped Azmeer repeatedly. However his brother didn't budge, pain an unworthy competitor to his serene expression.

'Don't wake her up,' Azmeer whispered as he gave a stare that even shut up Salim. 'She's special, I don't care about any of this Hazara shit, she's mine.' His voice almost a lullaby as his gaze permanently fixed on Salim, who was squirming with discomfort.

Sabrina rolled in her sleep as her eyes opened. She sat up as both the brothers gazed at her; both of contrary emotions. 'Azmeer it's dark, my parents are going to be worried. They most probably have a search party somewhere around. What do we do? She asked consequences swirling around in her brain.

'Come I'll take you,' Azmeer said, his voice hardly audible. He ignored the glare from Salim as he took her hand. He wasn't used to this sensation as he felt the overwhelming urge to take her in his arms but he walked grasping her hand as she talked about things

he couldn't hear in his state of oblivion. They walked to the bottom of the hill and Sabrina saw the familiar silhouette of her father.

She looked in his eyes, and his eyes rendered her speechless. She touched his face and gave him a tender kiss on his cheek. As Sabrina ran away she gave him a smile that left his heart palpitating and as the mystical orenda of Sabrina captured him in the dungeon of her love. He got goosebumps as thoughts about Sabrina invaded his mind. He smiled as he climbed back up the rocky terrain. His brain so unaccustomed to love was suddenly enraptured. Maybe she's the one he thought as he reached home.

Chapter 4

'Baba I want to go to school.' Sabrina shouted her face a frightening crimson - red. 'Every boy goes to school but why can't I. I want to learn, if you don't let me I'll go out of this godforsaken house.'

"Asal, Asal," Akhtar soothed as he stroked her shoulder but he knew this time was different as she shifted away her typically beautiful features concealed by rage. 'School is not for girls, your mother teaches you what you have to learn. You have to be a girl Asal' he said.

"No, I'm done with you Baba I'm leaving. I want to learn and maybe one day I'll make sure everyone has equal rights." Sabrina answered, throwing the gold chain her father had gifted for her birthday.

'Please let her go to school Akhtar.' Sabrina's mother pleaded as she cried at the thought of losing her only daughter.

Akhtar was angry now, his worst fear had come through. He slapped Yasmine. 'Girls don't need school. Sabrina get out of my fucking house, and remember if you try to get equal rights I don't give a rat's ass about shooting you. You aren't my daughter anymore.' he said kicking Sabrina viciously.

Sabrina had been spending a lot of time with Azmeer and Salim had come across about teaching her. Over the past one month, education had enraptured her and triggered the flame of education present in each and every soul. She took her bag and climbed up to her new home, the thorns a reminder of her colossal risk of making Akhtar her enemy.

As Sabrina stumbled up Salim heard a familiar whimper and he looked down to see Sabrina bleeding and hurt. He called Azmeer and they both climbed down. Blood soaked her shirt as she wept while the brothers carried Sabrina to her new abode, a place which would transform her life forever.

As Salim and Azmeer looked at Sabrina while she was sleeping, there was an air of silence as they sat confused. Salim's father had renovated the cave so it had electricity, running water, a bathroom and even a television. They had no clue how to take care of a girl but Azmeer was persistent and Salim admired her thirst for knowledge.

"Bro you gonna take care of her" Salim said passing Azmeer's food

'I know and stop smiling ,you ass. Atleast a girl likes me before you he said, punching his brother playfully.

'Well, she's quite the catch, don't screw it up' Salim said winking prompting another punch from his little brother. They only had each other in this dystopic land and as Salim ate he pondered if maybe they could overthrow this lethal government. He smiled to himself as he thought about the odds of it actually happening.

Azmeer caressed Sabrina's hair as he woke her up. 'You gotta eat Sabrina'

'I don't want to'

Azmeer gently helped her up, he took the chicken they made for her. He slowly brought it up to her mouth. 'Aaaaa,' he gestured, making her giggle as Sabrina opened her mouth eating the chicken.

Salim watched from the side laughing at them. 'Damn bro, how smooth can you get'

Azmeer laughed, throwing whatever he found next to him 'I'm going to kill you Salim.' Sabrina just felt Azmeer's skin as she lay her head on his arm.

'Don't move,' she said, her big eyes not leaving him for one second.

'Damn first day in our house and you telling me what to do.' Azmeer laughed as he pulled her closer and as he felt Sabrina snuggle up to him. He couldn't do anything but

feel the chains of love captivating him. 'Maybe I could live with this' he thought as he slept ; Sabrina always in his arms.

Chapter 5

'Salim,I need to ask you à question,' Sabrina said,her voice uncertain.

Salim turned off the television 'Sure what's up?'

'Why do the people in Afghanistan fight? Why does my father get so much money? As she emphasized about how her father used to get bundles of money in exchange for documents.

Salim walked around, his mind trying to process all the information that was ravaging the country. He leant on à colossal rock while Sabrina looked ,her eyes capturing her bewilderment. ' Um...Uh...okay...,'

'Wow the detailed answers I needed,thank you Salim.'

Salim tried to catch his breath,'Okay,your dad is à criminal. He controls all the crime in this area. He is why non-Pashtuns like us hide from almost everyone. He killed my parents. He wants Afghanistan to be à pure Pashtun country and he and the Taliban dream of eradicating every other Afghan. Your dad isn't afraid of death,I'm surprised he didn't kill you.' He finally finished ; his breath heavy as he slumped on the floor.

'Let's go to the police. Don't they put the bad guys ever.'

Her naivety seemed to lighten the air, as Salim laughed. 'Sabby,there isn't any police,everything is controlled by the Taliban.The police is Taliban,the government is Taliban,Afghanistan is just Taliban now.'

Salim now felt the crucial need to enlighten Sabrina about the atrocities of the Taliban and his intricate plan to dissolve this authoritarian regime which choked the country,it's integrity now reduced to dust. Salim made it his goal to teach Sabrina the basic subjects which she had begged so much to learn. While Azmeer juggled his marbles trying to woo Sabrina, she no longer paid attention to his desperate attempts during Salim's lessons.

Gunshots was almost music now, each bullet engraved with a person's name as screams of anguish echoed around the mountains. Sabrina started crying again and as Azmeer comforted her, kissing her head as he did so. The sound became louder. Salim realised something. 'Azmeer, take Sabrina and hide.' as he took his only gun from the safe. He loaded his .38. He trembled as the volume slowly increased. He hid behind the cave walls as his usual atheist mind prayed to the one above.

'Where are you? You fucking Hazara bastard. You want freedom we'll give it to you right here.' Akhtar snarled as his masked acquaintances surrounded the cave.

Salim appeared. He smiled. 'Too scared to let me live aren't you Akhtar.' His body suddenly crumpled as his abdomen bled, the bullet doing its job.

Akhtar smiled, as his men kicked him, taunting him to do anything. Salim lay helpless, the faint glimmer of life slowly disappearing. Akhtar kicked him again as Salim yelled in pain. 'Don't worry, we won't kill you now. Save your unholy blood for the public. Any more Hazara bastards in there, because we want to make sure you filthy insects lead a great life.' Salim shook his head. His only hopes were pinned on them and as he was dragged away, his body a slave to unconsciousness. He saw his brother, his serene expression still intact as he made their secret sign. Salim returned it, his eyes filling up with tears as his brother disappeared. He wanted to fight but he just couldn't. Another Hazara choked by Satan's cruel arms. As he slowly entered peace he prayed for Azmeer, for Sabrina and then that was it.

Chapter 6

As he sat at the edge of the rock, his legs dangling. He felt a rare emotion envelop him, sadness, he looked behind but Salim wasn't laughing anymore. He had never felt anger but at this moment, he felt a burning rage which took over his senses. He swore vengeance to the nation, the one which took his parents away, the one which took his brother away, now they wouldn't be spared. He took a sharp rock and then he made a clean incision on his arm, blood dripping from it as he did. Pain wasn't felt anymore as he engraved his brother's name on his arm. He stared at his crimson blood, his eyes shifted further. The blood of his brother still fresh. He sat down, the blood seeping through his shorts, The stars were abundant as they moved towards him almost as if trying to hug me. But then he felt a familiar warmth, almost melting the chains of hate imprisoning his heart as he felt tears run down his cheek.

Chapter 7

'Wake up asshole,you'll go back to sleep today' Akhtar snickered as he stamped on Salim. He struggled to sit but then he was slapped again as Akhtar let out his infernal laugh. This was going to be another public execution, à warning to those bastards who wanted à secular country. This country was Pashtun and he would do anything to achieve it.

Salim was groggy as he spat out blood, he was waiting for death now as he stared at the blood-stained walls. He saw the guards and he knew this was it, À huge crowd greeted them as he limped out,he recognised some Hazaras and some other tribes but the majority were Pashtuns poisoned by Akhtar as they threw objects at him and used language of the most explicit manner. Salim stood next to the place he would be hanged at,he stood tall and prayed for his brother and Sabrina.

'This is à warning for all you bastards who try to pollute Afghanistan.' He shouted as his guards simultaneously shot Salim. He was still alive,barely,but this was the torture segment. Akhtar kicked him and left him to die as he hung him.As Salim was left to rot,Azmeer,silently watching from the hills,swore revenge.

Chapter 8

Azmeer didn't understand the purpose of emotion. He viewed it as à waste of time and his face had always had the same old expression since his parents died. He glanced at Sabrina sleeping. However he never understood this emotion when he looked at Sabrina but this wasn't à priority, He opened the safe where Salim hid all his blueprints. All the intricate drawings bewildered them but there was one problem,he needed another guy. Sabrina woke up and walked towards Azmeer, as she hugged him ,her problems disappeared for à while. Maybe this was taboo but both of them didn't care.

Azmeer found the crucial need to teach Sabrina and both of them went at this task meticulously and as she was enlightened by the basic subjects ànd the important prospect of taking the Taliban down.

One day,tен men stood outside as they waited for Azmeer to return.They saw Sabrina and went for the attack,as she shrieked Azmeer shot them with rocks.His sudden

appearance à visible shock to the. 'What do you want, and first of all get away from her.' They sheepishly put their weapons down and walked towards him. They towered over Azmeer but his cocky manner commanded respect.

'Um first of all, sorry for Salim, we all pray for him.'

Azmeer tutted, looking bored, 'I don't need apologies, get to the point.'

'Well we want you to join in your brother's footsteps and join the Hazara rebels.'

'So just kill other Pashtuns to get freedom?'

The leader was now flustered, his face flushing red. 'Uh, we help our tribe and um...'

'Okay, before wasting my time here's my proposal. Work for me, I actually have ideas that will help our tribe and every citizen in this country.' Azmeer said as he rolled out Salim's updated blueprint.

The soldiers looked at it, awestruck, another soldier leapt up. 'Are you telling us to work for the Taliban?'

'Yes, isn't the language simple enough?' Azmeer retorted prompting laughs from the other rebels. He sat down red-faced

'So you're telling us to join the Taliban with disguises and extract information from them? If we get caught, it's instant death.'

'Well what do you propose, do whatever shit you're doing and get freedom, I'm only joining your group or whatever if we do it my way.'

Then all their eyes turned to Sabrina. 'What do we do about her' asked the leader addressing the elephant in the room. Sabrina was quiet as she stared at the men who killed her best friend, the men who choked her. But maybe this wasn't their doing.

'I think I can return home, maybe extract secrets from my father.' she mumbled as everyone roared in approval. Azmeer glanced at her to make sure she was okay but her hair covered her eyes. She didn't wear the traditional burqa when she was at home, finding it uncomfortable, but now she had to wear it around her father at the place she was brought up but now disgusted at the very thought. Sabrina's thoughts

overwhelmed her as thoughts of her mother came to mind. Sabrina missed her. The number of times she was shielded by her mother, her mother's redolence, the voice which put her to sleep. Sabrina wouldn't admit it but she missed her house, the home which she once felt part of.

Chapter 9

'Look at the bloody target Azmeer.' Mohammed, the leader, shouted as he trained Azmeer in the art of using firearms. Azmeer glared at him as he hit all seven targets, the clay birds breaking into millions of microscopic pieces. They had lots of work to do before embarking on their expedition. They learnt Pashto with an inspired dedication as they sat around the bonfire. They thought Sabrina different codes she could communicate with and as they all prepared meticulously for the big day, a hint of hope filled the army.

A few miles away, Akhtar was incensed as he heard about Shahid, that bastard. He had flown two weeks earlier to offer him the post of prime minister and bundles of money. He possessed a land which disrespected the very basis of their religion, a place where women could go to school. He shouted and threw this glass at the wall shattering into pieces. He commanded bombings and immediately. But then he received another call, a Taliban camp had been bombed and nevertheless by their own. His blood boiled as he tried to figure this out. He called the Pakistanis, they didn't pick up. He then saw UN personnel, he took out his knife, they still hadn't learnt their lessons. He walked up to him as he provided food to a Tajik person. Next thing the worker knew, he was on the ground and as Akhtar cut him up into pieces that could only be described as inhumane the Tajik man had enough. He swung with a metal stick and crushed Akhtar on the head, Akhtar feared his own death and as he stood up, the Tajik had enough as he moved closer to finish the brutal beast responsible for his suffering. As Akhtar prepared for inevitable death, he heard a cry of pain as blood sprouted from his head. Akhtar then saw the Taliban and as they helped him up, he only gave one instruction. 'Only Pashto, nobody else.' The very sentence was the final spark to the flame which had been enclosing Afghanistan in the dystopian arms of hell.

Akhtar was rushed to the nearby Taliban camp, his consciousness fading as blood dripped from his head. Akhtar was no stranger to the crimson color, but not his own as they reached the camp. The doctors rushed to Akhtar, and as he lay on the bed, the bliss of sleep overtook him as he smiled at the thought of tomorrow.

Chapter 10

Sabrina, now à eighteen year old goddess who mesmerized Azmeer, as he hugged her from behind as he kissed her on the neck. They got lost in each other's eyes, Sabrina moved closer and as their lips enveloped Azmeer felt giddy as he kissed back, his heart thumping as he moved closer. Their bodies wrapped around each other and as the fire burned in the chilly night, the warmth from each other was enough in the stygian empyrean of Bamiyan.