

Locks
A Rapunzel Origin Story

By Kym Fraher

CHARACTERS

MONA: 40-50-year-old woman, wise to the world, smart, studies and knows her community

ZELLE: 15-18-year-old young woman, can be bold to her own detriment, idealistic, beginning her understanding about the world.

SAMSON: nonspeaking role, sturdy with a strong body, age 20-30 years

SETTING

2021 in Tehran, Iran

LOCKS

Stage opens on a mostly bare room. A stool is in the corner, along with a few sitting pillows on the floor and a modest bookcase with a few books along the back wall. There is a small table with sewing supplies, including a spool of thread, a few torn clothes, and scissors, as well as a pitcher of water and a glass. A young girl, ZELLE, age 15-18, sits on the stool in the corner, sobbing. The back of her shirt is torn to shreds. MONA, age 40-50, enters with a wet cloth, concerned. Both women speak with a slightly middle eastern/Persian accent.

MONA

(sighs)

I'm so sorry, child. But told you that that was going to happen.

ZELLE looks over her shoulder at MONA, as she wipes the tears and snot from her face. MONA gently adjusts ZELLE's braided hair out of the way to reveal her back--there are red welts running up and down. MONA gently washes the lesions with the cloth throughout the scene.

ZELLE

(through her sobs)

I don't need "I told you so's" right now Mona...And **he** didn't even help me. I was crying out--he could see me being beaten, and he did nothing.

MONA

What did you expect him to do? There were four to one, and he certainly could not raise a hand to the morality police, especially in public.

ZELLE

He's my father! He insists that I grow my hair long, so he should protect me when I am being punished for doing what he wanted me to do!

MONA

He's should raise a girl who understands the boundaries of the society in which she lives.

ZELLE

Well then he's failed twice today.

MONA

(sighs)

Why you need to go through this to understand? You can NOT let them see your hair!

ZELLE

I know! But it doesn't make any sense! I was born with legs--they can see me walk! I was born with arms--they can see me reach for things! This--

She pulls her thick braid from behind her and
holds it in her hands.

--grows from my head! What is the problem? Why can't they understand that the same creator who made the hair on their beards made the hair on my head?? It does not come from an evil place!

MONA

Child. You are not new to this world. You know that it is not ours and never will be. And you'd better not let them see your arms or your legs or the beatings will be that much worse.

ZELLE

Pfft.

ZELLE turns away.

MONA

Listen to me, because it is true. You forget your place to your own peril.

ZELLE

Where can I go? Is there a place where a woman can live in peace and safety without men constantly blaming us as the source of their own misery and temptation?

MONA

If there is such a place, I have never heard of it--everywhere it is the same, even in the west. Who are we kidding? If it wasn't our hair, it would be our noses, then our ears, and then our eyes. Soon, they would decree that we weren't to be seen in public at all.

ZELLE

Is that possible?

MONA

Are you asking if I think it will happen at all or *when* do I think it will happen? Ahh, this is nonsense--We are upset about something that we have no control over at all. We have things to do.

ZELLE

Like what? Sewing? Reading?

MONA

Sewing, yes, but reading is a better idea.

ZELLE

I'm too upset to read right now.

MONA

(pats the floor beside her)

Then you come and listen to me read. We will set our minds to lands far from here and problems that are not ours to solve.

MONA goes to the bookshelf and chooses a book. She opens it, turns the pages, and finds what she is looking for.

Here. I have a wonderful story to tell you.

ZELLE reluctantly approaches MONA and plops down on a nearby pillow with attitude.

ZELLE

If you insist.

MONA

I do. Now--

With a flourish, MONA begins speaking in a heightened narrative tone. The lights dim on the room and rise in the corner. The corner lights cast a red glow as a long-haired man emerges and acts out the story. Each time the narrative is interrupted, the red light fades and the man disappears as the regular lights come back up on the 2 women. The red light and man return as the story recommences.

MONA

There was once, in the land of the Israelites/

Alarmed, ZELLE breaks in.

ZELLE

Wait! This is a Zionist book! It is forbidden to hear this story!

MONA

Girl. There are many forbidden things in this world for us. Is this new information to you? Please, let me finish.

MONA returns to her reading as the lights once again shift to red and the man re-emerges.

MONA

A male child was born who, through his incredible strength, was promised to deliver his people from their oppressors as long as he kept to a set of strict laws that included never to cut his hair. His mother named him Samson, and as he grows, he demonstrates his physical power in many ways: He is said to be able to lift and rub 2 mountains together and to have killed a lion that attacked him on the road.

ZELLE

How can you lift a mountain/

MONA

/Girl! It is allegory--an exaggeration! It is the way. Men. Talk. Now, shhhh!

He is finally undone by a woman with whom he shares his precious secret; that if his hair were to be cut, his strength would also be gone. This woman is paid by Samson's enemies to shear his hair as he slumbers, and, upon awakening from sleep, he is overtaken and imprisoned. But his captors are careless. They do not pay attention that as he toils, his magical hair begins to grow back, as hair always does. To celebrate their victory, Samson's enemies take him to the temple of their god, which is filled to overflowing with people eager to watch the defeat of this powerful man. Three thousand people gather, to witness his humiliation and shame.

MONA stops her story, the scene adjusts.

MONA

I need a glass of water--My throat is dry.

ZELLE

(annoyed by the interruption)

Your throat is dry??? But what happened to the man?

MONA pantomimes her dry throat and gestures toward the pitcher of water on the table. ZELLE begrudgingly and gingerly gets up, pours a glass of water, and hands it to MONA, who drinks deep.

MONA

Ahh. Thank you.

ZELLE

Now, you've had your drink, let's hear the end of the story.

MONA

(teasing)

Why? You have an important meeting that you will be late for?

The lights adjust.

The crowd is gathered to witness the shaming of this man who has already killed so many of their people. He is brought before them, muscles restrained by thick ropes, head held low, coal-black hair falling over his eyes. Wait a minute--hair??? His hair has regrown! The thought barely registers when the man strains hard against his bindings. SNAP! CRACK! The ropes fall like petals from a flower!

ZELLE

/Oh no!/
/

MONA

/He moves quickly sideways to place his massive hands against the main pillar that supports the temple roof, and he pushes with all of his might. A single scream is released pursued by a chorus of shouts and cries. Mothers rush to pull their children close, men run for the exits, only to be crushed amongst the legions of others with the same impulse-- To flee, to get out of the temple. But the roof collapses on them all, sparing no one, including the man with the powerful hair. The end.

ZELLE

The end?! How can that be the end? I don't understand. He killed himself?

MONA

Along with his tormentors, yes. It is, at its core, a story of revenge.

ZELLE

(unsatisfied)

It's another story about how men solve problems with violence.

MONA

It was about a man. He was the protagonist. With a gift of strength. What did you think he was going to do, *talk* his way out of trouble? I thought you'd enjoy it since it was about hair.

ZELLE

But his hair was a gift and mine is a curse.

Beat as MONA places the book back on the shelf.

ZELLE

I wish I were a man.

MONA

Don't say that. That is contrary to the way that God made you.

ZELLE

I want to be a human whose hair is not seen as an affliction but as a blessing, a connection to the divine.

MONA

Oh, my dear Zelle, how many times must I say this--it's not your hair that's evil in the mind of religious men! It's your face, and your breasts, and your bottom, and your ankles, and your wrists, and your fingers, and your toes. It's all of you and none of you. If a man has a problem with what God has made, it's not God's creation that is the problem. It is the man.

ZELLE

I've actually been thinking about this. And I think I know why men in our culture are so afraid of women's hair.

MONA

My philosopher sister, enlighten me. What have you discovered?

ZELLE

Our hair comes out of our heads and so do our thoughts. Our minds, our imaginations, our intelligence is also from our heads. So when our men see a woman's hair, it is a reminder that there is something...cooking in that region of our bodies, that they cannot access and cannot control. The worlds inside our heads are producing many things, and our hair is a symbol of those things.

MONA

You are a deep thinker my Zelle.

ZELLE

Mona, why isn't there an age when you no longer have to cover your hair?

MONA

Why would there be?

ZELLE

Because we didn't have to cover our hair until we were nine-years-old. Then it all changed--why that age, why nine?

MONA

Nine years was the age when a female would be traditionally available for marriage.

ZELLE

(gasps)

But anyone who knows nine-year-olds also knows that they are still children.

MONA

Yes, and so they changed the laws.

ZELLE

(scoffs)

But to thirteen. I was still a child at thirteen.

MONA

You bled at thirteen, and that is all that counts to the men who make the law.

ZELLE

But that supports my point. Why not allow older women--those who cannot conceive because of their age--to go without hair coverings? If the reason for the covering is to protect the women from an evil act that might result in a baby, then old women would not be a temptation anymore.

MONA gets up to begin the sewing.

MONA

I don't think you understand men very well, my innocent one.

ZELLE

If you were a man, what would you do? With all the freedoms that a man possesses?

MONA

This is a silly game that we don't have time for.

ZELLE

Of course we do--what else is there?

MONA

What about finishing the sewing that has been sitting in the same spot for 3 days now?

ZELLE

(slyly)

You can sew while you answer me.

MONA

And you can sew while you ask me questions.

ZELLE

Oh, please play this game with me! It would help me keep my mind off of my stinging back. And it's been so long since we've done anything just for our own amusement.

MONA

Alright. I will play along, but only for a minute. The work must be done today. Even with a wounded back.

ZELLE

Okay, good. So, what would you do, as a man?

MONA

(wistfully)

I would...walk into the market and take my time to examine, really look at the produce. I'd argue with the fruit sellers about their ridiculous prices and sit with my friends to watch the people go by. Then, I'd go to mosque and enter into the main entrance, in the center of the building, on the first floor to take in the splendor from that preferred section. I'd spend as much time as I wanted to pray and then casually make my way home, stopping to talk to whomever I want. I would not have to worry about time to prepare the food or take care not to meet another man's gaze on the way home. I would recognize the world as my own. Each breath I take would flow deep and unrestricted by cloth or the gaze of other men.

ZELLE

Oh, Mona, you've thought about this before/

MONA

/And I would go without a head-covering, even in the winter, to feel the wind on my head. This is what I would do if I were a man.

A beat moment as the women appreciate the vision.

ZELLE

That was a good answer auntie.

MONA

And what about you? What would you do if you were a man?

ZELLE

(dreamily)

I would awaken with the smells of breakfast and take my time to rise. I would wear linen pants and a light shirt in summer so that my body remained cool and available to the breeze. I would don my slippers and give thanks to my wife for my delicious meal. Then, I would go to work, where I could freely talk with my fellow men, without the morality police hovering near to catch a forbidden whisper. And if my friends on my right or on my left spoke to me, I could turn my head to hear them better, instead of shifting my whole body, because there would be no cloth burdening my face. And on the days when the sun beats down like the breath of a lion, I would go to the beach and feel the cool water on my body, instead of an oppressive head-to-toe covering that denies the touch of sea water on my skin. And I would thank God each day that I was not born a woman.

MONA

(alarmed at Zelle's enthusiasm)

This is a silly game and a waste of time. We are not men, Mashallah. And this game feels like a betrayal to what we really are.

ZELLE

(feeling the loss of possibility)

You are right. We are not Samson. And our hair is too tangled in our country's religion and politics to blow in the breeze.

MONA

Zelle, I think it is best that you stay inside for a while, several days or weeks. Give the men who did this to you a chance to move on to other victims and forget what you look like. So you aren't targeted again, before your cuts have a chance to heal.

ZELLE

You want me to be a prisoner?

MONA

It is not a punishment, but a way to keep you away from harm.

ZELLE

But what am I expected to do in the house all day?

MONA

There is always something to do! Finishing the sewing and mending for one thing. And preparing the food for cooking. When the children struggle with their studies, you could help them.

ZELLE

You want me to become a recluse.

MONA

Dear girl, I want you safe. Like a precious jewel. Now, it is getting later. I must leave for the market to buy some eggplant for tonight's dinner and some salve for your back. Please, I beg you, finish the sewing that you were to have finished this morning, before all the terribleness happened. Will you do this for me, habibi?

Both women rise and face each others.

ZELLE

I promise.

MONA

That's a good girl. And mind that you don't waste the thread. I was lucky enough to find a spool of the white last time I went. Next time, I may not be so lucky.

MONA gives ZELLE a reassuring smile as she exits. ZELLE looks at the objects on the table, then glances around the room, taking in her surroundings...thinking. She picks up the scissors, slowly pulls her braid around the her front and begins to hack it off with the scissors as she stares down the audience.

ZAN, ZENDEGI. AZADI.

WOMAN. LIFE. FREEDOM.

END OF PLAY