

The entry includes a short fiction piece and the below preamble which situates the piece within its contextual premise.

### **Background**

Situated at a jewellery shop in Amman, the capital of Jordan, the story presents a glimpse into Amina's (the protagonist) reconnection with singledom. Amina is on a quest to purchase a symbolic & economic artefact (more about that in the next paragraph). The story speaks to the actions through which she seeks to redefine herself against the perceptions and expectations of the Jordanian society she lives in. The story interprets homecoming as a come-of-age experience the protagonist undergoes.

### **Symbolic Connotation of the Title**

The title of the piece, *Leera Dahab*, is Arabic for a gold coin. In Jordanian society, gold jewellery is given to brides as a dowry. The first piece of the dowry is a gold coin given as a commitment to marriage. The coin is often adorned in a necklace and worn by brides. The jewellery transcends its aesthetic value to perform as an economic safety net for women in the long term. Women in need of money liquidize gold jewellery at any of the rampant jewellery stores in the city. They also build their savings by buying gold coins in hopes that price hikes in the long term would prove a sound savings strategy. The stores become sites where the buying and selling transactions are riddled with emotional entanglements.

### ***Leera Dahab* (Arabic for "Gold Coin")**

By Sandra Hiari

Noise of car honks faded in the background as Amina pushed the heavy doors of the jewellery shop. The interior of the shop was quiet in comparison to Amman's bustling streets. Its festive, shiny gold décor contrasted with her mixed feelings of apprehension and excitement. A few months ago, she started a job - for the first time in her life - as a public-school teacher. Amina had been setting aside an amount of money from her humble salary in preparation for today. For her, the visit exemplified how remarkable her fortunes had reversed.

She flashed back to her wedding night...

*Loolooli...* the familiar sound was ringing throughout the lavish wedding hall. Women from the groom's family were releasing the *zaghrouta*, a sound made by rapidly banging the tongue left and right in the mouth. Her future mother-in-law danced forward towards her and the groom. In her hands, she carried a plate filled with gold jewellery, a customary dowry from the groom. A gold coin necklace was centred in the middle of the plate. Sparkling underneath the disco-like lighting, it caught Amina's eye and admiration. Friendly laughs sounded from the crowd as the groom struggled to fasten it around her neck, sweating in the process.

Five years later...

After endless thinly veiled hints from her in-laws about her potential infertility, Amina became pregnant. Once her husband announced the news to her in-laws, the *zaghrouta* once again become the opening act of a new stage in her life. The joy was short-lived. She suffered a miscarriage soon after. Her husband's patience with becoming a father wore off and he decided to marry a second wife. Amina's request for a divorce caught him off guard. They struck a deal: she would hand over the dowry jewellery to him in return for a hassle-free divorce.

The sound of the salesperson snapped Amina back to the present. *"How may I help you?"* he asked from behind the glass display cabinets. *"I am looking for a gold coin necklace"* she replied, eyeing the necklaces. A mother and her son walked into the shop and stood beside her. They too were shopping for a similar necklace for the son's upcoming marriage proposal. *"Can you show me this piece please?"* Amina asked, trying to grab the salesperson's attention by pointing to a gold coin necklace. He picked two necklaces, handing her one. As she tried it on, the mother turned around. *"How beautiful the necklace is but it has a dent"*, she said pointing to the side of the necklace. *"I can grab another one"* the salesperson quickly intervened. Amina eyed the dent, gently caressing it. *"A natural flaw?"* she asked the salesperson. The word *"flaw"* struck a nerve, herself being rendered as such by corners of society given her fertility struggles. *"Absolutely"* he replied, *"it's handmade"*. *"Then I'll have it,"* Amina said. *"You sure?"* the salesperson asked.

*"Positive"* she replied. It would be the first of many positives in her new solo chapter in life...