

Marie: Homeless, a Beggar

(Born in 1924, in Aley; currently living in Beirut; recorded on the street. Language: colloquial Arabic tinged with a mountain accent.)

My father died when I was ten years old. My mother asked me, "Do you want to stay in Aley?" - at her aunt's place. I said, "Alright." I stayed in Aley. What I begged was taken by my mother's aunt. She was the hotel's owner. People used to give me money. She would come to my room and take it all. I left Aley. I went and worked. I was still a girl. I worked for an Englishman. He was a laundry man, he ironed clothes. I received tips. He gave me LL 45 per month. I worked there for a while. I was fifteen. Then I came to Beirut to see my aunt, my mother's sister. I was walking and I said to myself, "I'll sleep in this hotel, and tomorrow I'll visit my aunt. It isn't dark yet." I entered the hotel - it was called the Nazi Bhamdoun - I found a man eating nuts and drinking alcohol. He told me there was no room in the hotel (pause). He said, "I'll take you to sleep at my aunt's". I said, "Alright". I went and slept at his aunt's home for two nights.

Ghena: Where was your mother then?

Marie: She was at home. I went to Zahleh with this man. I slept for two nights at his aunt's home. I liked Zahleh, so I invited my aunt's husband to attend our wedding. We got married and went to a hotel. Yes, he wanted to marry me. We went to a hotel in Beirut and got married. We went to Bhamdoun and stayed at his parents' home. He didn't have a house of his own. We ate and drank at his parents' home. Later he rented a home for me. I got pregnant and had a boy, Fuad. He [husband] starved me and tortured me. He gambled and didn't give me money. So I stayed with him for three years and then I divorced him. I left the boy with his grandmother, and left. (pause)

Then I went to work as a maid, but I left. I found another man to marry. I married him and regretted it very much. Why did I marry him! He imprisoned me at home. He didn't allow me to go out. He pulled my hair, he didn't allow me to go to the shops.

After that he told me to give him money and he'll divorce me. I told my sister's husband he wanted money, "Give him money so that he'll set me free." He told me, "I'm afraid of him." He [husband] traded in weapons. That was his work. I stayed with him for seven years and gave birth to four children, a boy and three girls. He beat me and beat me without my doing anything, with the stick, with the belt. My hands were bleeding, my back was red like blood. "Save me from him!" Nobody listened. "Save me! Save me!" Nobody listened. Then I prayed against him. He came in the evening and I was at our neighbor's place. The girl was sick, we wanted to take her to the doctor. He told me that I had stepped on her stomach. Think of that! So he

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slapped me twice on the face and went and slept in another room. He had cows, I slept next to the cows' room. I started praying and asking God that he would get into trouble and end up in prison. His brother came and woke me. He said, "It's eight o'clock and you're still sleeping! Get up and see what has happened to Elias. He has killed someone and they have put him in jail." I liked that (laughs). I laughed because God had answered my prayer. He was drunk, got into a

quarrel and shot someone. The man was in a coma for three days. I was laughing (laughs). He said, "What! You're laughing instead of crying?" I laughed because my prayers were heard by God. I left. We sent his father to the prison. He brought from him [husband] a paper divorcing me.

My second daughter's husband was killed by a shell. She went to the monastery and served there. Beyond Jounieh. She has two daughters. Another of my daughters lives in Sin al-Fil, she has three children. She used to visit me, but she doesn't any longer. She gave me her phone number but I lost it.

Ghena: When you divorced the second husband you took the children?

Marie: I left them with their grandmother on their father's side.

Ghena: You didn't want to take them?

Marie: I went to look for work.

Ghena: You told me you had three daughters. One is in the monastery, one in Sin al-Fil, and one in Jbeil. What about the boys?

Marie: One boy.

Ghena: You said you had a boy from the first husband and a boy from the second husband.

Marie: Yes.

Ghena: Where are they?

Marie: The boy is in Jounieh in the civil service.

Ghena: The second boy?

Marie: I went around and had fun. I wandered.

Ghena: The other boy from the first husband, where is he?

Marie: I lost the first one. I saw him once in al-Burj. His wife (pause), he got married (pause), his wife told me, "This is your son." I said, "What? Show me his identity card." I didn't believe her. She showed me his I.D. It was true. He was my son. He didn't say, "Mother, come and stay at my place" or anything. He didn't say anything. I kissed him and left (pause). Now I've lost sight of him.

Ghena: So you left your second husband after he went to prison,

and you went to look for work?

Marie: Yes. He's married now. He came out of the prison and got married. He stayed in Jbeil.

Ghena: What happened then?

Marie: I went and begged, I begged on the streets. Once my husband stepped on a fork, and it cut off three of his toes and after a while they had to cut all of his leg off. Now he uses a stick to walk with. He has only one leg because he tortured me. He beat me even when I did nothing. I told him I wanted LLI to repair something. He beat me. Whenever I asked him for anything he'd beat me. See what God did to him! They amputated his leg. I didn't feel sorry for him. Do you think what he did was little! He hung me from the balcony and I was screaming (pause). He made a tent for me and imprisoned me in it. A tent on the roof. I couldn't go downstairs. Once I went downstairs to talk to his mother. He saw me and beat me - why had I left the tent? Oh God, how he tortured me. He was a terrible tyrant. Haram, once he beat his mother with his slippers. He beat his mother on her head.

Ghena: How did you live after leaving this husband?

Marie: I wandered around in the afternoon in this area.

Ghena: Wandered around! I know that you used to work, you didn't beg.

Marie: Yes, I loved like that, I went with men, for pleasure.

Ghena: Not for money?

Marie: No, for pleasure. And sometimes for money. The policemen used to catch me and put me in prison. Once they put me in for three months. Then I got out of jail and wandered around again. Then they caught Marie again.

Ghena: Marie, how did you decide to start sleeping with men?

Marie: After I divorced my husband. The first husband and the second one. I got upset. I found out that these men were no good. They didn't feed me or provide for me or anything. (pause)

Ghena: Was it easy for you to start this work?

Marie: Yes, easy, natural. (laughs) The story is finished.

Ghena: No, it's not finished.

Marie: Yes, I went with people and I was imprisoned. I got out of jail. I went with people again. I was imprisoned again. They kept imprisoning me.

Ghena: What did you feel?

Marie: What did I feel? (laughs)



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Ghena: Yes, were you content or did you regret anything?

Marie: No, I didn't regret, I was content.

Ghena: Are you content now?

Marie: Now I suffer from diabetes. I have to keep buying medicines. I was unhappy only when I went to prison.

Ghena: Men treated you well?

Marie: Yes, in the past I wasn't fat and ugly like now. Now I'm old. I used to be beautiful as a young woman. I put make-up on my cheeks and lips. I put make-up on, yes. Once I went out with a shoe-maker. I told him, "Give me LL5." He gave me. We went in a taxi. Oh, I wish it had been a taxi, it was only a 'service'. We walked for an hour. We reached the place and found two men sitting outside. He opened his bedroom and told me, "Go inside." I went in. Oh God, what he did! As soon as he got on me, the neighbors came. "Open the door!" - they were cursing him - "Open the door!" Two men came inside. They hit me on the head and they hit him on the head. I left him to be beaten and ran away. I saw a married couple on the road. The man told me, "Come and sleep at our place." His wife got mad. She pulled my hair. She was jealous. I told her, "I don't know your husband." A man passed by wearing pajamas. He defended me. He saved me from her hands. Then I left. (pause)

Ghena: That is your life story?

Marie: That's it.

Ghena: I want to know your whole life story.

Marie: I told you my life story.

Ghena: Can a life be told in ten minutes?

Marie: Yes, it can. I got married, I was divorced, I had children, and I did that, as I told you.

Ghena: Who is the person you love most, your mother, your children, one of the men you met?

Marie: I loved a man, but he went to Jordan. I was young then.

Ghena: Why didn't you marry one of the men you loved?

Marie: Like that.

Ghena: Why?

Marie: No one married me.

Ghena: Why?

Marie: They took three bones from here and put them here. That's enough.

Ghena: No one loved you?

Marie: No one loved me. What could I do? There were many women in the Burj, many like me. Men felt satisfied.

Ghena: None of these men got married?

Marie: They didn't marry me. What could I do?

Ghena: Didn't you want to get married?

Marie: Yes, but they didn't want to marry me.

Ghena: Why not?

Marie: They want to marry girls. I'm a woman.

Ghena: Marie, this can't be all your story. Can you tell me it again?

Marie: (Angrily) I married the first man - I met him in the, Nazl



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Bhamdoun. "Will you marry me?" I asked him. He said, "Yes". We went to Zahleh and got married, and went to a hotel, a different hotel, Khadawiyet al-Kubra. I was still a girl. He slept with me and I became a woman. He took me to his parents' place in Bhamdoun. We spent one night in the hotel and then went to Bhamdoun. He worked whitewashing houses and also worked in manual labor. I lived with him for three years. Then I

divorced him and left the boy [her son] with his grandmother. I left. Then I met another man. "Will you marry me? Will you marry me?" He kept on asking. I told him I had money. But all I had was LL10,000. When we got married he hit me on the mouth. I was bleeding. He wanted me to bring him money. I brought him money. He bought cows, three cows. Everyday he beat me up. Every week he used to beat me. I kept asking for a divorce. He wouldn't divorce me. I stayed with him for seven or eight years. I had four children. I asked God to harm him, he was imprisoned. I got divorced while he was imprisoned.

Once I went and found a man. His friend was sitting next to him in the car ...

[Marie tells stories of several encounters with men. We decided not to publish them because other speakers whose words appear here might feel abused.]

Ghena: Marie, isn't there anything in your life but your stories with men?

Marie: No, that's it. A woman is born, she gets married and has children.

Ghena: What about your children and mother?

Marie: What can I say about my mother? (laughs). I once hit her with a stone.

Ghena: You hit your mother - why?

Marie: I was upset with her. (pause)

Ghena: Marie, I need to ask you one more thing. If you had lived somewhere other than Lebanon do you feel your life would have been different?

Marie: Live outside Lebanon?

Ghena: Would you have liked to live somewhere other than Lebanon?

Marie: I would have liked, but I couldn't. My children didn't help me. They didn't give me money to travel. You need money to travel. My niece and her husband went to America.

Ghena: Are you trying to remember something to tell me?

Marie: I'm trying to remember a story but there aren't any more stories. (pause) Don't you want to bring photographers so that they'll give me money? They took a photo of my stick once.

Come back in a few days, come back!

Recorded and translated by Ghena Ismail