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### **‘The girl next door’**

It was in the mid-summer when we met for the first time. Unornamented and unadorned, she looked meek and gorgeous. Her black almond shaped eyes were looking at the arrival of a new guest, a new member into the apartment. The very first time when I saw her face, it was lost. We greeted, exchanged handshakes with a smile.

Of course, She was going to be the “girl next door” for the two consecutive years of my post-graduation. I love meeting people; especially because everyone you meet has a story to tell and stories fascinate me. Days passed, we mixed up and talks began to flare. I was curious to know the girl who was buried behind this smiling face.

Abstruse though, she was in her late twenties. Emaciated frame, parched hair, leaden face and outdated apparel had added at least 10 years to her appearance. Even though she was only 28, she was grown into an old woman. She had a laugh that can be heard miles away, yet she was silenced. Her face had lost its youthfulness. Evening walks, shikara rides, shopping, eating, talking, even reading elifshafak and orhanpamuk, my university life with her was the most exciting and memorable part. We learned, unlearned together. She was the joy of my life. Then one day we were having coffee and talking about how education plays an incredible role in one’s life, when a frisson of discomfort passed across her face, so subtle as to be almost unnoticeable.

But I noticed. I asked. She hesitated, unsure what to say or didn’t want to say. Her voice trailing off, uncontrollable hiccups and a loud cry said it all. She was under a dark cloud. Parental favoritism has always been painful for less favoured children, even more painful when it encompasses your love for education. She was little when quarrels would erupt in her house on her education. Education is every child’s right. It is a basic need; in her case it was different. She was never allowed to have a choice, to study what she wants to. She fought, faced multiple rejections. Her own family became an obstacle, never supported and permitted her to get education. Her desperation to survive, leaving her with no other choice but to surrender herself. She tried, failed. She tried again. Until she conquer. It was she who fought and freed herself from the shackles of pain, suppression, abhorrence and patriarchy. After the pain ended, pleasure began to fly. Her determination and love for education opened the doors to unexpected opportunities, she is living her dream. She is pursuing PhD but the pain, the misery, the hatred she endured lives with her and will continue to. We live in a society where boy education is preferred over girl education, even if the boy fails to score well. Girls are often left out if the family fails to allocate enough resources to education. I was raised by a father who made sure both me and my brother gets same kind of attention and education. Everybody isn’t alike. It is important to realize by depriving her of education we keep her blind folded, empty

and unfulfilled. She relinquishes her true essence, her rationality suffers and only chaos prevails.

It is time to see beyond those traditions and prejudices that encouraged us to shortchange girls. Education provides eyes to men and women altogether. Educate her; she will make this world a better place to live.