

Write your own Historical Fiction 2025

The Hidden Truth

By Haaniya Khan

Water. It stretched on for miles. Where was the tribe? I had been travelling for days and nights. Hours and minutes; still there was no sign of it.

"We're nearing the tribe Halima, only a few more hours," said Sheikh Ahmed, "May Allah guide us."

Finally. I decided to ignore the second part of his sentence. I was too exhilarated to even say Ameen. Even a few hours seemed like a long time, given the number of days we had been travelling for. My mind crammed with thoughts of how it would look like. A place where I wouldn't be underestimated. Different from the bazaar where the Byzantine Empire ruled.

"Excited are we, Halima?"

The sheikh seemed to read my mind. I should have seen it coming. He never seemed to miss any of my facial expressions. I nodded, my excitement not giving me permission to speak.

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My dream took me into a whole different world. A place where there was a democracy. A place where no one was underestimated. A place where we could practice our beliefs. But most importantly, a place of respect. I felt as though I was trapped in a trance. As though I would never be able to slip out of the beauty of the Kayi tribe. Lush trees looming over the tents as children cried in jubilation. The trance was broken by the sheikh's soothing voice.

"Aziz, Aziz! Wake up!" He only called me that when it was something important so I knew it was worth waking up for. It took a while for my eyes to adjust to the light.

"Yes, what," I mumbled under my cold, tired breath.

"We're here! We're here!"

"What? How? Where?" I was unable to believe it. We had actually reached the tribe. I jumped up – nearly toppling over the boat in the process.

"Halima calm down c..." Suddenly his voice trailed off. At first, I was confused and curious as to what the sheikh was looking at but when I turned around, I understood why. What lay in front of me was a field of ashes and burning tents. A field of dread and despair. A field of crying and weeping at fate.

"N...no this isn't the tribe. Sheikh w...we have to go back. Where have you taken us." My eyes swelled with tears as I clutched onto his arm. Where were we?

"Halima dear, get a grip on yourself. This is where fate led us. We will do our best to fulfil our duty. Halima, don't you understand? This is your destiny – to help these people, to cure them, to aid them in their time of need. Why do you think Allah has made you a doctor? Help these people and

prove yourself to all those who underestimated you. This is your chance – claim it and use it for good.” I wiped my eyes. I had never cried.

“Be brave Halima,” I told myself, “Life is a journey and we’re all part of it.”

We slowly trudged out of the boat, bearing only a few clothes and the little coins we had left. Slightly shaken, by the reality of what had just happened to the tribe, I slowly walked towards the tribe, still clutching onto his arm whilst holding my bag of medicines. I took a deep breath and slowly stepped inside the tribe – everyone turned and looked at us in surprise as though they had never had anyone come to their tribe. Suddenly all the people in the tribe rushed over to the sheikh and started kissing his hands, shouting and exclaiming in delight, “Sheikh, sheikh, oh thank goodness you’ve come! Oh, what a delight to see you here!”

Osman Bey must have heard the commotion, and so he came out wondering what could bring his people joy after a Mongol attack. When the sheikh saw him, he jumped back - startled and, as I looked in his eyes, I felt a sense of acquaintance between him and the Bey and was sure that there was a flicker of sorrow that had passed between them. After a much-prolonged silence while we walked to the Bey’s tent, we sat down upon the fur coats. After being served sherbet the Bey said, “So what brings you here sheikh...?”

“Sheikh Ahmed.” They were both acting like they had not seen each other before. Why? My trail of thoughts was broken by the bey’s hoarse and deep voice, “Oh, sorry forgive me, Sheikh Ahmed.”

“No, no, do not worry. My niece here is a doctor. Her father died when Halima was born. We have come to help your tribe after the suffering they must have been through,”

“Oh, thank you so much sheikh, you have come to us in our time of need, may Allah bless you,” Osman bey expressed.

“No, no, do not mention it. We all have a chance to do good in our lives, it is our choice to claim it and use it for good,” he said taking a sip of his sherbet.

“Of course, sheikh. Sorry, forgive me, you must have travelled a long way. I beg your pardon you must require some rest. Gerkutai Alp!”

“Yes bey.”

“Gerkutai, please take these visitors to their rooms.”

“Of cou - “

Suddenly, I stood up.

“Sheikh, why won’t you tell me what’s going on. How do you know each other? I can sense the acquaintance. Don’t lie to me, please.” The sheikh and the Bey looked shaken as though they wouldn’t expect me to ask that.”

“Dear Halima, you will soon find out when you come of age. For now, go with Gerkutai and treat some people who need help.” The sheikh replied. I was raging but I knew there was no more that could be said. I followed Gerkutai only managing to hear the words: “thank”, “caring” and “friend” behind me as I followed.

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She had an open wound. Blood ran from her arms – a child's arms. How cruel could the Mongols be? The tribe was already suffering from the plague, yet still the ruthless Mongols had come to take over. Suddenly, the sheikh walked in.

"Halima, dear please I need to talk to you." I ignored him; I was not ready to talk to him. I moved to the next patient. He followed. "Halima please its urgent."

"What!" I exclaimed, irritated by the fact he had been hiding things from me.

"Halima, come with me." I followed. "Halima, we need to migrate. Along with all the people who don't have the plague. The bey has decided." I knew that was about to come, the plague was inevitable, every tribe had dreaded catching it.

"Where will we go to? There is no other place for us and the tribe to go."

"Well, Halima, there is one place for us to go, your mother's tribe."

"B-b-but I thought that ama had died. I thought that she was an ordinary citizen from this exact tribe."

"Halima, there is lots to tell you, but for now we must migrate with the tribe before the plague spreads any further."

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The pleasant sound of horses galloping filled my ears reminding me of ama and how she loved horses. I looked back at the tribe following the other migrants' gazes. As we migrated, I fixed my eyes upon the sheikh and the bey - my eyes darting between them. The last thing I could remember was stopping at for a break and the world around me slowly proceeding in the depths of darkness.

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I dreamt of my ama telling me my father was with me and she would show him to me. Just as he was about to proceed towards me to hug me I felt someone shaking me calling my name. I slowly and reluctantly opened my eyes to see the bey and the sheikh hovering above my head holding a bottle of water. Sitting up, I took the bottle of water and drank a little at a time. The sheikh said,

"Halima, I have something to tell you."

"What?" I mumbled.

"Osman bey, I think it would be best if you told her."

"What?" I said firmly, trying to regain myself, frustrated by the fact no one was telling me anything.

"Halima, I am your father."

I sat back. Startled. Was this the truth? I felt a mixture of frustration, anger and joy swelling up in my stomach.

"When you were a baby, the Mongols had attacked. Your mother went out of her way to save

you. She was the bravest woman I ever knew. Her eyes were the most beautiful I have ever seen. You look just like her. In an attempt to save you she died. We were outnumbered but we still fought on. I was the bey of the tribe. I could not run away and abandon the tribe. So, I left you with the care of the sheikh in hope that I would someday find you again, and alhamdullilah I did.”

I ran to my horse my only companion that wouldn't lie to me. My eyes swelled with tears. I quickly wiped them away in the hope that no one would see me. I was brave and would not cry.

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We had arrived at the tribe, and I stormed to my tent. How could the sheikh do this to me? Suddenly, the sheikh came running in.

“Halima, the sultan's here. He wants to see you.” I was shocked by the reality. I quickly adjusted my headscarf and proceeded to the bey's tent. As I walked in, I observed the beauty of it all.

“Halima Hatun, I have heard of how you cured the injured and wounded many times after Mongol attacks. I have come to offer you a place as the royal doctor. Thank your father for he is the one who told me about your hidden talents.” My heart pounded. Finally, I would earn the respect I had longed for my whole life. Joy flooded my body.

“Alhamdullilah” I said to myself. The sultan exited after saying goodbye and I ran to the bey. Suddenly, my anger had cooled down. “Thank you, Baba. Thank you.”

“Halima, dear, your mother's wish was for you to be a doctor like her. Now go Halima, fulfil yours and your mother's dream.”

I was going to fulfil my dream.

