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The First Time I Saw Prostitutes

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THE FIRST TIME I SAW PROSTITUTES

Rita Rizkala

I was about sixteen years old,
When my mother spotted them
And whispered in my ear,
“*Haram*, those poor girls...”

There were three of them,
As young as the jasmine
Blooming in my *jido's* garden,
But the white petals stripped
From their fair buds.
Their skin was pale yellow,
Eyes drooped and bruised,
Probably from the drugs.
They followed a man,
Tall, dark and burly,
Disguised as the “father”
Yet pacing ten steps ahead.

The pack stumbled and weaved
Through the crowded *souk*,
Blending in like a red crayon
Lost in a sea of black ones.
They crossed the busy street
Into the isolated alley,
And climbed up the stairs
To the abandoned warehouse
Right above the ice cream parlor,
Where children licked their cones
And danced with chocolate mustaches,
Never to be seen again.

haram = “What a shame” in Arabic

jido = “grandfather” in Arabic

souk = marketplace