Bourne toWrite...
creative writing workshops

Rejection

by Lesley Dawson

The end of the semester came finally and Marwan was glad to be going home to see his family. He was exhausted with all the emotional tension that followed his breakup with Amal and then the upheaval in the university about who had stolen work from whom. He would be glad to eat his mother's maqluba instead of existing on tinned soup and falafel sandwiches bought from the shop opposite the main gate. He sighed with relief at the thought of his own room at home where his mother had kept with all his childhood books and games and pictures. The bed he thought dreamily, you could sleep in that bed, not like the hard mattress on his bed in the boys' hostel.

Marwan hoped that the news of his humiliation had not reached the village via other students going home for the holidays. He couldn't bear it if his father and brothers teased him about his lost romance. Fortunately, they were so glad to see him that no one said a word about Bethlehem or university that first evening. All he had to do was ask about all the local gossip and he didn't need to say another word. The talk never stopped until sundown when Marwan felt so tired he went to bed.

After a wonderful breakfast, so huge that he couldn't finish it, his mother allowed him out of her sight. She wanted to feed him up as she told him he looked like a skeleton. Walking down the main street he became conscious that nobody greeted him and a few people turned away and hurried out of sight.

This was very odd as he was usually very popular and had been the captain of the school football team and the main speaker at the youth club debating society.

He walked into the coffee shop to meet his best friend Islam who embraced him and slapped his back at in former times. Islam would know what the problem was.

“I’m very upset that I havn’t been congratulated on my university grades. I sent the certificate home to my father and was sure he would have broadcast it all over the village.”

Islam deliberately added more charcoal to his hookah before he looked up at Marwan, “Yes, we did hear about your successes in Bethlehem, but we also heard about your liaison with this Christian girl. We could not believe that you would break the rules like that.”

“What rules have I broken? There is nothing in the Quran or the Hadith about Muslim men marrying Christians.”

“You have upset the girls in our village because you seem to have rejected them in favour of this stuck -up Christian girl.”

“I was not promised to anyone when I left the village. I was free to meet whoever I wanted.”

“Were there not beautiful Muslim girls on your programme at the university that you had to choose someone so different?”

“Yes, there were, but I was not attracted to any of them. I was attracted to Amal.”

“You were the first one from our village to go to university and we expected great things from you. Instead, you have shamed us before all the Palestinian people.”

Still not understanding what was so wrong in what he had done Marwan walked home sadly. He decided to visit his uncle in Haifa as he was a pariah to his friends and longed to get away from the reproachful looks of his parents and the barely contained anger of his brothers. The sooner the holiday was over, and he could leave, the better. But then he thought of returning to Bethlehem and being ignored by his classmates too. Life would not be pleasant. The only good thing was that he had heard on the grapevine that Amal had been sent away to family in Italy so he would not have to face her.