

A Great Afghan Souḷ



by Phyllis Chesler

When “my” Aisha/Meena, one of the women whom I helped rescue from Afghanistan, and to whom I’ve grown close, read my piece about my loss of funding for this very reason, she immediately sent crying face emojis with these words: “You lost it because of us. Oooh! I am so sorry.” I assured her that I would do it again because being able to save a life is even more important than money. Then she wrote: “You raised money for me through gofundme. Do you think I need all that money? I will find a job to support myself. You can have half of that money to keep your shop. Trust me, I would be grateful if you use a part of that money to save your shop.”

I wrote that I was “very moved by (her) spontaneous generosity.” But oh, how I laughed as I explained to her that the expression “closing up shop” was an idiomatic phrase meant to convey stopping or reducing my literary output and my activism. She somehow imagined that I had an actual bookshop! What a charming idea. I explained that I do not have a stall of books in a bazaar—but that I remember well the sweet birds

singing in cages that the Kabul shop keepers kept in their street stalls near the Blue Mosque, near the Kabul river so long ago. A moment of nostalgia for a time and place in which my posh life was endangered every single moment. She wrote: "I know the Mosque and the river but the mosque is old and the river dried now. The area is crowded with people. I don't like that part of Kabul because a woman named Farhunda was killed near the mosque."

I will be asking her about Farhunda today.