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## Carriable Heart

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Carriable Heart

Sara Abou Rashed

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There was something extraordinary about being an 11-year-old with a purse. A real one, at that. It first came as a gift to my mother, who I suspect saw me eye this 6-inch black leather rectangle of mystery and decided to gift it to me. Its golden studs lined in the middle to form a diamond. Its short leather handle, the upturned arc of a smile.

“Do you like it?” she asked, knowingly.

I carried it everywhere. To grocery stores, family visits, the park, even the short distance between my bedroom and the kitchen. On days I’d hurry to the door in untied shoes and half-buttoned shirts, afraid my mother had left without me, she would remind me to go back and get it.

One afternoon, we were on the steps of our house, ready to leave. My mother then handed me a list of errands and 1,000 liras. If I felt joy carrying a purse, carrying a responsibility instantly more than tripled it. It was a promotion, an acknowledgment, a badge of honor that straightened my neck and made my head rise just a little taller.

We walked side by side to the market across the street, my fingers gripping tightly to the strap of my purse so as not to reveal my secret. We entered one of many medium-sized grocery stores on the lively Al-Yarmouk street, two kilometers of boutiques and thumbing feet of hurried passersby. A glass door and rows of categorized items greeted us. With a smirk only an 11-year-old can wear unjudged, I surveyed the shelves for all my favorites. *Chocolate milk, almonds, fig rolls, red Pringles, dry pineapples, more Pringles, more pineapples.* That day, I lingered in the snacks aisle a while longer, as if I had already decided I could have every shelved item if I wanted, only I was too humble to actually reach for them all. Our cart was just short of spilling over, the items I picked out shining amidst jars of green and black olives, pickles, grapes leaves—dull in their adult-like sameness.

At the register, the middle-age cashier scanned everything in a prompt and orderly fashion, his creased olive-skinned hands multitasking with ease. 625, he finally announced. My mother then looked over, beaming with pride. Her eyes glistened and she motioned with her right arm for me to *go ahead*, giving me permission to lead as her body moved back, giving way to mine. I unzipped my black leather purse, and took out the only things it contained: two 500-lira bills. The cashier’s eyes opened wide in surprise, but he kept to himself, figuring out the math. I took the 375 liras from his palms and put them back in their special pocket, where at the pastry shop half a block down, I’d pay 175 for the two most tempting chocolate mousse tarts.

You could say this was the beginning of an irresistible love of all things with pockets, zippers, and straps. Over the years, I've dedicated drawer after drawer to purses that invited themselves to my hands: brown Italian leather found in Amsterdam; beach-themed baskets from Dubai; an embroidered Palestinian purse, my only taste of the Homeland; sparkling clutches, frequent dance partners; a beige boxy handbag for professional meetings; a denim daily favorite, among a dozen more.

What is a purse but a woman's carriable heart? A treasury of secrets, a trusted companion, her birthplace of abundance or scarcity.

In my last few months in Syria, when the war was getting closer by the hour, I'd often rearrange the purses, decide which of them to pack and which to thank and let go. But my first black leather purse, I will never give up. How when my mother and I searched to buy a home in this new country years after we moved, it searched, too. How it looked around with us, investigated rusty closet doors and abandoned nooks, turned door knobs, smelled carpets, judged kitchen cabinets. How the day we found the house we liked just a little more than every other, it sat at the agent's table with us. *We're ready to receive the down payment check*, the agent said. I could swear my purse whispered then, opened itself up for my fingertips to reach the stamped thin piece of paper—everything my mother and I have.

*You've just paid for our home*, my mother said. *Congratulations, co-owner*, and she patted me on the shoulder. I couldn't help but fidget with the zipper some more, swing it left and right, left and right, certain there's more magic to come out.