

THE TEST

Curatorial Essay

Transcript

Written Tributes



VISITOR GUIDE

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CURATORIAL ESSAY BY ISA ALI AND JADA PARADA-HEMMINGS

In many faith's traditions, queerness is seen at best as an abnormality and at worst, an immoral act of sin. Those who were raised to fear God were often raised to fear Hell, with the prospect of Hell being one of the many ways in which queer Muslims are encouraged to reject their identities. In their exhibit "The Test," A. Sheikh calls attention to queer Muslim experiences through the stories of eight participants. Bringing visitors into their most vulnerable moments, these participants share how guilt and shame, imposed on them by religion, family, and themselves, brought them to the point of suicidality. Sheikh invites visitors to sit in conversation with the participants by playing the audio interviews in a *majlis*, meaning "sitting room," in Arabic. "The Test" queers the *majlis* by imagining a space in which discussions surrounding queerness, Islam, and mental health can be had, directly challenging deeply rooted cultural and religious taboos. Through this exhibit, Sheikh shines a light on shared trauma and shared healing. Above all else, "The Test" is a demonstration of Queer Muslim hope.

In the Abrahamic faiths, suicidality is generally seen as a moral failing, rather than a sign of suffering or distress. Suicidality, often cloaked in silence and stigma, emerges as a prevalent experience amongst the queer Muslims in "The Test." Shrouded in harsh judgment, the participants found themselves trapped in a cycle of self-incrimination and suppression, which lead to feelings of intense isolation. Many of the participants noted that they felt alone in their situations, often wondering why this is happening to them, or why no one else seemed to be struggling the same way. Feelings of isolation were compounded with guilt and shame, exacerbated by religious teachings and cultural mores. The shared experiences of the participants demonstrates how the spectre of suicidal ideation is not just an individual struggle but a communal cry for understanding and acceptance. Rather than queerness or religion alone, it may be fair to say that loneliness proves to be true cause of the participants' suicidal ideation. It is with this in mind that "The Test" proves to be such important work, as it rejects isolation through its very existence by creating a space for queer Muslims to connect and support each other.

The *majlis* setting in "The Test" plays a crucial role in its narrative. In parts of the South West Asian and North African (SWANA) region, *majalis* exist in both public and private realms, serving purposes ranging from discussing important political issues, hosting wedding receptions, paying condolences, and socializing. "The Test's" reimagined *majlis* is furnished with traditional items—cushions, rugs, low tables—and adorned with art, Quranic verses, and other objects commonly found in Muslim homes. For the eight Queer Muslims whose stories anchor this installation, the *majlis* symbolizes both nurturing and rejection in relation to their queerness and religious identities. With its dual function as a living room and public gathering space, the *majlis* embodies the thematic intersections in "The Test," as it becomes a safe place for both faith and queerness. Sheikh, in effect, queers the *majlis* by making a space in which queerness, Islam, and mental health can be discussed openly, and without judgment. By situating these conversations within the context of a *majlis*, Sheikh underscores the importance of creating inclusive spaces where queer Muslims can find solace and affirmation.

There is an implied mutual-exclusivity to queerness and religion that is continuously validated by traditional practices and teachings. Queerness and Islam were seen as opposing forces by the participants, with many of them noting that they felt they had to reject their queerness to be truly Muslim, or reject Islam all together in order to fully embrace their queer identities. This is a mentality that many people adopt when it comes to faith and sexuality, but "The Test" rejects this notion by showing the intersection of queer self-acceptance and religious faith. Rather than suggesting we abandon religion, the participants share their journeys back to Islam, demonstrating how faith can transcend dogma. They show that such transcendence only comes as the result of having the courage to carve a new path for themselves, despite the cultural and societal pushback. Arguably, the most significant point to note about these participants is that they survived. Their stories did not end in isolation. By sharing these experiences, Sheikh makes space for queer Muslim stories of hope, where faith and queerness do not need to be at odds to be embraced.

"The Test" is an exercise in creating a space that fosters dialogue and reflection. The installation is designed to be immersive, inviting visitors into a space that is both familiar and new. The arrangement of the artworks within the installation is carefully curated to evoke a sense of both individual and collective memory. Specific objects are positioned to create a narrative flow, guiding visitors through the lived experiences of the participants. This spatial arrangement emphasizes the interconnectedness of the themes explored, reinforcing the idea that personal identity is inextricably linked to broader communal and cultural contexts. The multimedia nature of "The Test" allows Sheikh to weave together diverse modes of storytelling. The audio track creates a dynamic narrative flow and as it is played in different parts of the room, attendees will feel they are sitting in the middle of a conversation between the participants. The floor seating, calligraphy, and personal objects in the majlis create a sense of comfort among the difficult themes being addressed. Written tributes to individuals who have passed as a result of suicide remind visitors that a lack of affirming spiritual spaces has real and tragic consequences. This blend of media not only enriches the installation but reflects the multifaceted nature of the identities and stories being represented.

Through this installation, Sheikh offers a powerful commentary on the intersections of queerness and Islam while also creating a space for healing and productive dialogue. Through the experiences of eight queer Muslims, we are shown the dangers of isolation, the importance of community, and the power of faith. The installation is a testament to the strength and resilience of queer Muslims, highlighting their struggles and triumphs within the context of their faith and identity. Through a carefully curated blend of audio and experiential design, Sheikh demonstrates the sheer power of making space.

This curatorial essay aims to provide a deeper appreciation of the themes and concepts that animate "The Test," underscoring the crucial role of art in fostering understanding and representation for marginalized communities.

AUDIO TRACK TRANSCRIPT

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;00;27

I grew up in Calgary.

00;00;00;27 - 00;00;03;17

I was born in Mississauga.

00;00;03;17 - 00;00;05;14

I grew up in Delhi, India.

00;00;05;14 - 00;00;06;29

I was born in Mozambique.

00;00;06;29 - 00;00;09;28

I was born in Pakistan, city of Peshawar.

00;00;09;28 - 00;00;11;24

So I was born and raised in Toronto.

00;00;11;24 - 00;00;12;29

I was raised in Iran.

00;00;12;29 - 00;00;15;12

I was born in Saudi Arabia. Mecca.

00;00;15;12 - 00;00;17;25

I knew I was, like, different from people...

00;00;17;25 - 00;00;20;25

I started realizing I'm different, right?

00;00;20;26 - 00;00;51;20

I'm not supposed to be feeling these things, you know? Like I'm in my high school and I'm experiencing having intense crushes, mostly vivid sexual images playing in my head of me basically doing it with my classmates, like certain ones that I had crushes on. And as hot and steamy as it was, it was equally challenging, it was equally painful that I was like there has to be something wrong with me...

00;00;52;03 - 00;01;26;01

I'm not the same. All the guys around me talk about girls, but I'm not. And for the longest time, I was in denial but at the same time, I was also ignorant to like the fact that even gay people exist. I remember thinking stuff like, oh, I just look to men because I want to have their body or something like that like I want to go to the gym and get a six pack. I kept telling that stuff to myself that I look up to them like, no, I just wanted to fuck them [laughing] right?

00;01;26;01 - 00;02;00;28

I actually remember in fifth grade I wrote a paper because we were debating whether same sex couples should be allowed to adopt and I was on the against side of it. And like, my teacher actually put all the papers up outside of our classroom and it was literally just me and the other Muslim kid, both of us were against and I think, like seeing I was like where are my views actually coming from? Like, I feel like a lot of this is just something that's been instilled in me but I don't have any actual reason to be against this.

00;02;02;02 - 00;02;35;02

My family didn't have favorable opinions of queer people. My mom actually worked with this lesbian couple and they would come over and we'd cook dinner together like my mom would teach them how to make Indian food. And I once got a ride on the back of their motorcycle, which is really gay - really fucking gay. And you know, I liked them and my mom was nice to them, to their faces, and then they would leave and my mom would shit talk them. And, so I got used to that kind of way of thinking about queer people.

00;02;37;26 - 00;03;23;26

I never really, you know, thought that Islam wasn't inherently anti-gay or anti-woman or anti-whatever. It only became extremely difficult and negative when I was 18, because that was when Covid started, and that was when a lot of queer Muslims are at home with people they don't want to be with and they're alone with their thoughts. And a lot of people turned to religion, including my mother and that's when she became very, very religious, whatever that means. She just was, she was almost paranoid, she was kind of like using queer people as a scapegoat into societal decline like there was one time where she even said that Covid was a punishment for queer people and things like that and...

00;03;23;26 - 00;03;36;21

When I came to like queerness, it was like really something that I could not reconcile and I was like, I'm not gay, but this is wrong and then I was like, I'm gay and this is wrong. And I didn't feel accepted and so my belief wavered.

00;03;37;20 - 00;04;39;24

The thoughts really manifested heavy about how I was a mistake, basically, and a lot of it came from religion, right? A lot of it came from the wrong teachings of religion and how the whole thing was viewed, which is also why I kept pushing religion away, because I was like, why would I even take part in something that inherently views me as less, as bad, as sinful? Like I was just born in sin, I guess what am I supposed to do? Right? But at one point I also tried praying the gay away, like they say. I feel like everybody did, like all queer people did at one point. Obviously it did not work [laughing] you can't pray the gay away, it's not a thing. At one point in my life, I just was like, I'm an atheist even though I knew I still believed in God, but I was just like, I just want to push this whole entity away from me because it's painful.

00;04;40;26 - 00;05;16;07

I went to college. I started exploring my sexual orientation. I never had the liberty to explore it. So that was the time I just grew apart from my faith, and I found that it was restricting me. I felt suffocated, I felt restricted and like, I can't do this. I can't be a queer. I can't be a Muslim. At the same time.

00;05;17;06 - 00;05;40;19

One thing I can say is when it comes to my relationship with Islam, I've never not believed in God. I feel like that's something that a lot of people struggle with like on the borderline of agnostic or atheist. I never not believed in God, but the way I express my religion has fluctuated. A majority of the Muslim world would think that what we're doing is un-Islamic. So how dare I do that?

00;05;44;12 - 00;06;41;06

And I walked away from it. And for a very long time I wasn't praying, I wasn't reading Quran, I wasn't doing any of those things and I just walked away from it completely. And that's also with the added stress of being a brown girl, a brown Muslim girl post 9/11, going to school every day, and people just making all these comments about you and your people, and people who look like you. I did that weird rubber band thing where you try to go as far away as possible to the complete opposite. I found I was still subconsciously asking for guidance from Allah. I was still searching for guidance from Allah. It didn't matter how bad it got [crying] so that's like [sniffle], that's been a constant.

00;06;45;19 - 00;08;56;29

My relationship with Islam is very much dependent on how Islam was facilitated to me by my teachers, by the school staff, by the TV. We had a teacher that told us that if you masturbate for long enough - apparently he believed, this is how he explained it to us that we have, like, [laughing] this is so funny now that I'm thinking about it. We have like, imagine a bottle of masturbation juice, let's say [laughing] in our body somewhere. If you masturbate too much, that bottle will be empty and then you will start taking the masturbation juice from your brain, and then you find yourself - am I saying masturbation too much? Is this a masturbation friendly space? Okay, then you realize at one point that you're masturbating blood, and then afterwards you're going to go blind, basically. So in my mind like and I'm like, fucking 15, 16, I'm masturbating so much it's like all I'm doing [laughing] and every time I'm like, oh my God, I'm dying like, I'm going to be blind at one point like it's inevitable, I've masturbated so much like to the point of no return you know? I remember one time that my parents came home late and I had masturbated the same night, and in my mind and because I hadn't heard from my parents either, and I called their phones and they weren't answering, in my mind, I was like, because I've masturbated, they have died, I've killed them you know? [laughing] I was convinced I was like they are in a car crash like they have experienced an accident because of how deviant I am and how much I masturbate, you know? So I had those ideas about myself, obviously I was suicidal, you know, obviously, I was like I could just kill myself and then it will it will all be easy like no one has to deal with it anymore.

00;08;58;26 - 00;09;42;26

I didn't even know I was suicidal when I was 16 because it came to me in ways like, oh, I wish, I hope I don't wake up tomorrow and I thought I was joking and stuff right? I found out about Grinder. Mind you, this is back there, not here. Without going into a lot of details, I was kind of groomed by an older guy, and then I was forced to do stuff that I didn't want to. I didn't even understand what was going on. I obviously got off the app. My self-esteem crashed. It was already bad, but it crashed. My suicidal ideation got really much worse. It was kind of like a shock, but I didn't even have time to be shocked because at that point, I was getting ready to immigrate.

00;09;44;19 - 00;11;21;21

In April of the year of grade ten, and I had told one of my friends I was like, hey, like, I think I'm bi. And she didn't react very well and I told her the day before April Fool's Day, just in case that would happen. I told her at that time because I was like, okay, you know, like if she reacts badly that I can just be like, April Fools! and that's what I did because she, like, physically moved away from me and I was like, I was joking. And I think it was kind of like a downhill spiral because I'm like, damn like, my best friend thinks I'm gross because of who I am, or who I thought I was at the time. I yeah, like I tried the first time that summer. I took a bunch of pills [deep sigh] and then I started freaking out afterwards because I was like, oh, shit like, what am I doing? And it was like, probably like two in the morning, I went to my parents bedroom. I was like, hey, I took a bunch of pills, someone take me to the hospital and then they did and then they called their friend, who's a doctor, and he came over and he's like, oh, yeah, like it's fine like, with the amount that that they took, like, they should be okay. But like, they gave me something to make me throw up or some shit because like uh but yeah, like it was, and then, and then they just made me feel like horrible about it. Like they were like, look, we had to call a friend like, now they know that you're suicidal. And then I was like, yeah, this is all my fault like, I'm so fucked up like, why would I try to take my life? Like, why you know why would I bring shame upon my family?

00;11;22;26 - 00;12;38;24

Out of nowhere I discovered I have anaphylaxis from dairy. And then I started figuring out my gender identity at the same time. And I had panic attacks because I'm trying to figure out who I was. How can I be trans? There's a mistake. I don't think that's true. Maybe I'm just, you know, exaggerating my thoughts. Maybe I just think it's cool to be trans or to be different and that's why I am just conditioning myself now that okay, you are a trans guy just because it's trending. Because of those panic attacks I was like, do I really want to live? [laughing] so that was the time when I was suicidal the most like I had those thoughts with the highest intensity. I even used to sit and plan, make a foolproof plan like I can take a shot of milk just a sip, okay, it won't have to be much. I'll just take a sip, go to the washroom and lock myself up.

00;12;41;27 - 00;14;06;04

When I was 18, my mother told me that we're going to go to Bangladesh to see my grandmother and I'm like, girl, this is peak Covid season like, what are you talking about? But in the end, it's like, you know South Asian parents, you can't say no like if I don't want to go to Bangladesh, I just can't say no like, where do I go? On the streets? Come on now. So when I went to Bangladesh, upon arrival, I found out that my mother found out that I was queer through my, at that time, white girlfriend slash person I was seeing. I was basically, subject to an Imam trying to almost exorcize me like I was stuck in my grandparents house with my mom in the vicinity and this Imam would visit me every day trying to convince me to just not be who I am. And then obviously, marriage was also in the question, talking about how, oh, I understand God made you to have certain needs, if you want to alleviate those needs, you need to get married. And then there was a big attempt I did where I just drank like a bunch of cleaning solution and I went to the doctor, I had to go to the hospital. And that in itself was a humiliating experience because my uncle, who's a doctor, came while I was on the ground and he was like, go upstairs, like, go to the roof and go jump like you're making such a hindrance for us like you're such a problem.

00;14;09;17 - 00;14;42;25

We had an intervention and they asked me how I felt and I was like still gay and they were like, how do you know? And in front of my grandparents, I'm like, I don't want to say this and they're like, no, no, you have to say it and I'm like, well, girls make me wet. And then I got slapped [laughing] and then I got kicked out. So, yeah, I was like, on the streets slash, like, couch surfing with friends for a little while. I mean, I can't speak to everyone who's been suicidal, but I feel like it's not just like an innate thing, it's someone is making you or something is making you want to die.

00;14;43;03 - 00;16;08;08

I made the mistake of going to a gay men's support group. The support group was all white old men. The way I had to explain everything constantly. Mind you, that's supposed to be a safe space. At one point, one guy was like, if your family is giving you so much trouble, just cut them off and I just was like, I can't do that. He was like, what do you mean, I did it? I was just sitting there in my mind. I'm like, yeah, because you're white and you don't really have a culture [laughing], so cutting them off won't stop you from having a community. But my family is my community. I was also asked, like, why am I still religious? Or why do I still identify as a Muslim? And I was like, that's actually because Islam is not homophobic at all, actually, and it's quite peaceful. And I was just laughed at almost and ridiculed because they're like, that's not what it is. And I felt very offended because I was like, why is this white man telling me what my experience is like? And he thinks he's so right like that audacity of him sitting there thinking he's so right and I'm so stupid and inferior to him, and he's so above it all. And he's like, religion is bad, you guys are oppressing us. So yeah, I definitely like queer spaces are not welcoming at all to Muslims.

00;16;10;13 - 00;16;55;12

For me, it feels like you choose between life that has like meaning and versus like suicide, which is like, according to religion, you're kind of doomed to hell if you do that right? Or the third kind of unrealistic option is you live life completely alone, which for me is like torture because I'm pretty, like, I like romantic things. And then the only, kind of hopeful scenario is me finding a partner but it's more complicated because if I choose that there's all that family pressure, all the societal pressure of like you're a terrible person and like you're going to Hell.

00;16;56;13 - 00;17;18;12

Over time, we worked together - it was a lot of fights, a lot of talks, and she got to the point where she understands that this will not go away, she has a gay son. And she told me she's like, I love you no matter what, no matter what life you choose, no matter what path you take, I still love you, it doesn't matter if you even stop being Muslim.

00;17;18;12 - 17;57;14

I am just able to have the relationship with them that I want, you know? I am just able to I guess not fully be vulnerable with them because I feel like there's parts of myself like they would never understand, like my drug intake, you know, my relationship with guys. And I feel like, you know, like the gay relationships I can't really talk about, but they see me wear makeup, you know, they see me painting my nails, they see me paint their own nails, they see me put on perfume. And I think in so many ways they have grown exceptionally so that they can understand me, so that they can embrace me, so that they can like, you know, make space for me.

00;17;58;10 - 00;18;38;25

I honestly, I will say with my full chest [pause] like, being queer is a beautiful thing, but at the same time it's really hard and to this day, I still wish I was straight just because of how much easier my life would have been right? I do, I believe it's a test. Yes, I actually do, because I'm like, there's no way it's this hard and it's not a test like it's just - I'm sorry [laughing]. I think it's a really, really hard test but that's the beautiful thing about our religion, the harder it is, the better the reward, right?

00;18;38;25 - 00;19;41;05

And I feel like even the biggest scholars in the world will never be able to interpret Islam for what it truly is, because it's not meant to really be understood fully in this world. Like I took a gender and sexuality class in Islam course at U of T, and it was very healing because a lot of the things that we consider like objective in Islam, like haram and halal, are actually like, in a way socially constructed, like, when the Quran was released [laughing] when it was debuted, it had to be like, interpreted and who interpreted it? Men, like humans, not angels, not divine entities, like it was humans. I think it's foolish for people to just objectively say that queer bad, queer bad, Muslim queer no exist like I just think that's ridiculous. Like, if you can accept or debate about, I don't know, like women and women driving or women going to school, which some people think is objectively yes or no, why is there no room for queerness?

00;19;41;18 - 00;20;50;29

I reached out to another Alwaezah, an Alwaezah that I heard was queer. And I saw on her website that she had free spiritual counseling sessions and so I booked one. And before I knew it, my whole life story was like tumbling out of me and I was like sobbing on the phone, talking to her. And I was saying that I felt like Allah didn't want me and so I left and now I'm like I don't know how to come back like, I don't know how to be like I missed this because I left, and also Allah left me. And she was like, Allah never left you, like, he's always been with you, or they've always been with you, or she's always been with you. I think she gave me all three versions and I was like, that's pretty rad also, while I'm sobbing [laughing]. And, she was like, Allah loves you. And I like, felt that in that moment like, I felt Allah with me in that moment and I was like, okay. So then that became kind of a way for me to like, come back in.

00;20;53;06 - 00;21;08;18

Allah has created me exactly how I am meant to be in this lifetime, I cannot change that. And to say that Allah created me wrong is insulting to Allah.

BEYOND BLUEPRINTS ARTIST STATEMENT BY NOOR AWAN

In this piece, *Beyond Blueprints*, I use Islamic architectural elements to serve as the constructing material for gender performativity, specifically within my own context as a queer, non-binary Muslim. Drawing from Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, gender is not just a fixed identity, it is dynamic, it is actively performed and shaped by our actions and behaviours. The interplay between the layers of archways serves as a visual representation of the nuanced and fluid nature of gender expression, defying the rigidity of the binary framework of gender that I grew up with. This binary framework decontextualized gender from other axes of power relations that constitute our identities. Each archway symbolizes different layers of my identity and the experiences that I live with, including gender, disability, religion, neurodiversity, fatness, race, feelings of belonging, and feelings of alienation. The mutual influence of these elements is shown by overlapping the arched windows in varying degrees of opacity, colour and degrees of completion. I resist constructing a traditional building, with the intention of visually transcending the limitations of societal norms and expectations regarding gender.



Just as I explore my own gender performativity in this piece, contextualizing myself within the Islamic architecture I grew up with, these multifaceted layers encourage an inclusive and intersectional understanding of gender that viewers could apply to their own performativity and dismantle the gender norms they might find themselves in.

<https://noorawan.format.com>

I'M SORRY, I LOVE YOU

My dearests are trying hard to die this year. At the beginning of this pandemic, I saw death in my peripheral vision and determinedly looked away. Now, I stare back as hard as I can. I wonder about me and the bleach; how we considered each other last June. I got it confiscated, and try not to think about the number and location of other cleaning supplies in our household, or how to negate something is to think about it anyway. Counting is therapeutic. Counting the months since the shelter I built brick by brick, knew every inch of, and trusted so deeply, avalanched and flattened me. 16 months already? Grief has lay beside me in bed all the while. Pulled me close, held both my hands. Close enough our noses touched. Counted with me; counted the months.

Mounted on my bedroom ceiling is a spectacular image of Sarah Hegazi at Cairo's 2017 Mashrou' Leila concert. Sarah's chest is open to the sky, and she grins bright like dying embers suddenly blasted with oxygen. For a night, Sarah is free, wearing her pastel rainbow flag as a cape and superpower. Likely, this is the photo that got her arrested, tortured, and exiled. I look at Sarah each night and tell her: I am sorry I am sorry I am sorry I am sorry, I am sorry and I love you and you were supposed to be safe. And I am sorry. I sandwich a duaa for her and her family in two Allahummasali3alasayyedenaMuhammads, so Allah accepts it, and my dead stay dead.

Beside Sarah's joyful face is a letter from one of my greatest loves, the one I want to laugh with for the rest of the days Allah gives me. I put the letter up a while ago, but my dear friend tried to overdose last month. I love you, I am sorry, I will hold you as hard as I can, I cannot let you float away. I hope my ceiling was not destined to be a graveyard.

So before I fall into as many hours of delicious sleep I can get, I look at my love and my grief, the love with nowhere to go. I feel those feelings. Certain people have not been shy in vocalizing that to continue indulging this is to have lost faith. I have not lost faith. The only thing that feels more like drowning than this is to forget, or pretend to, or tuck it away for the sake of functionality. I will not be dishonest; I will not lie and say this is not what drowning feels like, sincere attempts at oxygen constantly extinguished by these waves of mourning. I will not lie. The only thing worse is to pretend it does not hurt. I will grieve. To be faithful is to tell the truth.

- LAYLA

TRIBUTE TO EDEN KNIGHT (2000 -2023)

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Eden Knight was a Muslim-raised trans girl who, due to a lack of acceptance from her family, decided to end her own life. Originally from Saudi Arabia, Eden made the difficult decision to cut ties with her family, as they were unable to accept her for her authentic self. Her family awaited her return only under the condition that she hid her true self, denouncing her transgender identity. Eden's dedication to authenticity was inspiring to many but left her financially and emotionally vulnerable, forcing her to live in shelters and survive off the kindness of her friends.

After months of precarious living situations, Eden was approached by an American man named Michael Polcalyko, who claimed to be interested in "fixing" her relationship with her family and promised to meet her financial needs. Desperate for safety and security, Eden agreed to move to Washington with Polcalyko, away from her support system of chosen family. Such security would never come for Eden. Rather than receiving the protection she was promised from Polcalyko, Eden was forced to move in with a Saudi lawyer named Bader Alomair. Alomair would make her dress in men's clothing which she reluctantly agreed to because she was dependent on him for food and shelter. Eventually, Eden was made to fly back to Saudi to be with her parents. Upon her arrival, Eden's passport, phone, and hormones were taken away from her, isolating her from the rest of the world and herself.

On March 12th, 2023, Eden posted her suicide note on Twitter. The first line read, "If you're reading this, I've already killed myself."

Eden's death took the community by storm, awakening a grief inside us that felt all too familiar. Just three years prior, Sarah Hagazi died in a similar vein, a tragedy that ripples through us even as time passes. Losing Eden Knight felt like losing the future. She was too young to have even started the good part of her story - she was taken before her life really began. Eden's parents would later admit that they hired Michael Polcalyko and Bader from an American security firm to get her back home and de-transition.

Eden had dreams of becoming a leader in the trans rights movement, creating art that made her community feel seen, and to eventually becoming a trans elder for younger generations to look up to. Towards the end of her life, she knew that would not be a reality, but she hoped that her death would at least cause some change. She played a significant role in trans-Twitter discourse and served as a role-model for many young queer muslims. Eden started a brief career as a musician in Virginia, where she studied computer science at George Mason University. She was known as sunshine incarnate to her close friends and partner.

Eden Knight, our martyr - I am so sorry for the way the world treated you. Every step we take to create a better world for our people is in your name. We remember you when we gather, when we grieve, when we play, and when we dance.

- SUMMEIYA KHAMISSA

