



Zafar, Samra (with Meg Masters). (2019). A Good Wife: Escaping the life I Never Chose - A Memoir. Toronto: Harper Collins.

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Samra Zafar's book, "A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose," is a remarkable memoir. It takes a deep dive into the transformation of Zafar's identity, when she gets an arranged marriage and when her marriage dissolves. She moves to Canada to get an education and have a blissful marriage. However, this isn't what she encounters. She faces manipulative in-laws and her relationship, which was once content, suddenly becomes abusive and devoid of happiness. She is held emotionally hostage by the belief society has instilled in her of what women should tolerate. Moreover, she loses herself in her marriage by being forced to prioritize the role of being her husband's wife. Zafar's journey to self-realization takes course as she fights for an education and a better life for herself and her two daughters. She graduated from university with the help of peers who saw her potential. With time, she was able to escape and create her own identity and freedom. This memoir displays Zafar's perseverance in pushing for the life she wanted, even when facing adversity. Furthermore, her story can be seen as a source of inspiration to many people worldwide.

Education is a notable theme throughout this book, as Zafar explained her desire to attend university. This was done by showcasing the importance of education that her parents instilled in her. Her father taught her and her sisters early that "girls can be anything they want" (p. 24). He nurtured the love of learning through dinner discussions about articles and what the girls have

learned at school (p. 24). In a sense, what Zafar showcased is that her sense of individuality came from her schooling, teaching her to be who she wanted to be. Her mother reaffirmed this belief by being different than the women in her community. Instead of staying at home, doing housework, and being a wife, she was an Urdu teacher (p. 25). When it came to women's education, her parents went against the norms of her culture and Pakistani society regarding what a girl should do. However important education was in her family, societal pressures were still more of an influence. The example used to coerce her into accepting the arranged marriage was her Aunt Nasreen. Her aunt went to school and became a principal, which was an accomplishment. However, because she waited so long, the importance of being married had driven her to a "childless, loveless marriage" (p. 56). Zafar, in her book, illustrates a grim universal truth in many countries, especially undeveloped ones. Which is that going to school can be seen as a privilege, not a right and subsequently less prioritized. In comparison, marriage, especially at a young age, is much more prioritized.

Zafar, in her memoir, reinforces a valuable lesson to young girls and women: never give up on education, even when doors close. She proves this by relaying what had happened to her. She initially had to decline her acceptance letters from the University of Toronto and York University. This was because she was denied assistance from the government as her husband's salary and the assets, he had been too high. Her father-in-law told her to disregard education and to focus on being a mother and wife. Her husband scoffed at the idea of paying for post-secondary education because he believed the money could be used better. Instead of giving up on her dream, she turned to educating herself differently. She learned how to apply for jobs and sought a position

to help with the bills. This showed her the importance of taking finance into her own hands. Zafar taught herself how to run a daycare. She made a profit from the business to pay for her siblings to come to Canada. Furthermore, she learned how to drive, which gave her a sense of autonomy in the bleak life she was living. Finally, "eight years after leaving high school in Pakistan", she could return to school (p. 292). She persevered to get back on the path of post-secondary education, even while having two young children. If she had given up, she wouldn't have been where she is today. So, in a way, her book brings hope to all people, especially young women, and girls, and illustrates that although the path may not be easy, it is still doable.

Another notable theme in the author's memoir is abuse and domestic violence. Zafar writes about her experience of sexual assault, abuse, and violence. She strategically does this to bring awareness of the stigma women in Pakistani and Muslim culture face. Zafar's relationship with her husband starts initially happy, where they are both looking forward to each other's company. However, it becomes a cycle of abuse. Zafar doesn't know it to be abuse because she is told by her mother-in-law that "it is permissible in Islam for a man to hit his wife. It is written in the Koran" (p. 172). She is also told that she has it far better than most women, as even the ones "who have it much worse, still stay" (p. 172). This conflict of culture and religion to something that is socially unacceptable is something that Zafar must grapple with. She showcases to the readers that she wants to escape but is conflicted with the role she should commit to in hopes that her husband becomes better. She also has seen abuse in her parent's relationship, but her mother stuck with her father, so this can reinforce the notion that she should stick it out. The author's memoir gives insight into the reasons why women stay in relationships with abuse and domestic violence. One

of the reasons, as seen with her, is not knowing what constitutes as abuse. She has seen sexual abuse at a very young age, with a man kissing her in an elevator. She has also seen it with the imam teaching her the Quran and touching her inappropriately. She was susceptible to this abuse because she was never taught what it was in the first place. The realization that she was in an abused relationship came from insight from a university counsellor. The counsellor relayed to her that she was getting abused and explained the cycle of abuse. The cycles were described by periods and phases such as tension, incident, honeymoon, and calm periods. This was a significant part of the book as Zafar has taught readers what she had learnt at that moment. This is that abuse is a real issue, it is not the victim's fault, and it is not "the right way to be treated" (p. 300). She also showcased another reason women might stay in a relationship with domestic violence: fear of repercussions. This can be seen in a lot of newcomer groups. The fear of speaking out, being deported, or having children taken away due to not being financially stable has led many women to stay silent. Zafar showcased this fear as she was hesitant to share her experience with anyone for fear of losing custody of her daughter. She was told by a woman she met at a drop-in daycare and by counsellors that it would not happen; however, she waited until she became a Canadian citizen to leave the country. Although Zafar waited for her passport, she lent her credibility as a survivor of domestic violence and showcased that these fears are misguided. Furthermore, she showcased that there are credible organizations willing to help women in similar situations like her. She overcame her domestic abuse by realizing that the cycle of abuse would continue no matter how good her husband Ahmed became. She tackled her fear head-on by using the opportunity when her husband divorced her in the eyes of Islamic law to leave him and start a new chapter in her life.

Zafar's book teaches readers to reconsider their knowledge of the cycles of abuse and their relationships. Whether good or bad. The extraordinary journey of Zafar's life is also one to be admired and brings hope to women or men who are facing similar situations. Her story can be a testimony that there is light at the end of the tunnel for those who couldn't get an education or those facing domestic violence. The audience that would be interested in reading this book could be those currently facing domestic violence or have faced it. Sociologists can be an audience who are looking into the experience of newcomer women. Counsellors can also be an audience looking to gain insight into how to deal with violence, especially in immigrant and newcomer communities. This memoir was beyond well written, and as a Muslim woman, I can understand where she is coming from. Her journey has been of utmost inspiration to me. I don't think anything needs to be changed, as her account of her journey showcased an authenticity and rawness that brought me to tears.