

The Flower In The Desert

Chapter 1

Sati lived alone, in a small hut on the edge of the village on the edge of the great desert. Living alone was unheard of for such a young boy, but Sati wanted it that way and no-one, however hard they tried, could persuade him to do otherwise.

His mother had died first. In childbirth, taking the unborn brother he'd longed for with her. He'd lived with his father after that, just the two of them. His father did his best for the seven year old boy, but the simple truth was he hadn't the will to live on without his beloved wife.

One terrible morning, three years to the day after his wife died, in the middle of the marketplace, Sati's father died too. Of a heart attack they said, but even at such a tender age Sati knew his father had died of a broken heart.

After that, many of Sati's relatives and neighbours insisted he come and live with them in their homes. He thanked them all very politely, but he refused to move from the home he'd shared with the mother and father he'd loved so much.

His hut wasn't much to look at, just a one room dusty shack, but in it was held the tender kiss of his mother and the shy smile of his father. In it was held his childhood.

By the time he was 13 years old Sati was grown up in all but years. Unlike the other children in the village he didn't go to school. Instead he scratched a living looking after two woebegone camels that his neighbour Mushta used for taking tourists out for trips into the desert.

This work did not generate much of an income as the village attracted few tourists, but even so Mushta guarded his business closely and with immense suspicion. He was the only man in the village who took tourists into the desert and he was fearful of competition – not least from Sati, who he feared would set up on his own when he was a little older.

“You are not to be trusted,” he said one day to Sati with a dismissive flick of his hand. All Sati had done was tie a saddle just a bit too loose. Not enough to be a danger, but it was more than enough to bring on Mushta's anger.

Sati cried that night. Quietly, alone, in the silent darkness of his home – just as he had when first his mother, and then his father, had died. He knew very well what it was not to trust. His parents taken from him, he did not trust life. Now he was not to be trusted himself.