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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

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THE SANDHILLS OF ARABIA

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Islamic Propagation Organization

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Postscript

Remember that this world is a thoroughfare, a road upon which people are passing night and day, and the next world is the abode of permanent stay.

Do not go there with a burden of sins and vices before the One Who knows everything about you.

Examine yourself before you are examined.

Nahjul Balagha

By Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib



Presentation

It goes without saying that literature in general, and fiction in particular, has great influence on the readers, disregarding age, class and knowledge.

Thus, fiction, in all its forms, has been an effective means of cultural communication, through which ideas, experiences and information, good or bad, could be transplanted into the minds of the readers for different purposes.

This vehicle of mental approach has been mounted by the philosophers, politicians, sociologists, ideologists and social reformers, for the objective of winning as many supporters and followers as possible.

The imperialists - and before them the colonialists - who spare no means, whatsoever, in carrying out their aims, could not overlook such a weapon which never misses its target. Consequently, they allotted great fortunes to buy off the pens of the novelists at high prices, to pass their imperialistic ideas through those pens in order to camouflage their plans and deceive the people.

Yet, the job was not so easy as they thought it to be. There were many resisting obstacles in their way. Religion was the biggest one. So, they had to remove it out of the way. Since all original religions reject all forms of injustice, corruption, oppression,

aggression, superstitions and myths- all of which are among the weapons depended upon by the *Istikbar* [the arrogant powers] in implementing its objectives. It did succeed in some instances and could empty the divine religions from their original contents and turned them into mere hollow skeletons. They could even deceive the clergymen themselves, making them think that religion meant nothing but to abstain from worldly affairs and completely turn to the other world, the Hereafter.

Our Prophet (S.A.) refuted this inclination by saying: "Act for your world as if you were to live forever, and act for your Hereafter as if you were to die tomorrow."

Thus, the culmination of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, lead by the late Imam Khomeini, in 1979, awakened the original innate faith in the people and reminded them of what had been forgotten of the Islamic fundamental principles. So, everything began to change fast to conform with the original Islamic teachings.

The change covered the literary arena, too, and they began to appear new types of humanistic and anti-imperialistic literature, aiming at fighting away the non-Islamic western way of life.

It pleases us, in this respect, to present *The Sandhills of Arabia* which was originally written in English by its authoress, Laila Hasib, as a worthy step on the road she had chosen for herself.

The incidents of the story are supposed to have taken place in the state of Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation. They are intended to portrait the invaders' brutality, though not as brutal as they actually were.

We do hope that this praiseworthy attempt of Laila Hasib would be a good incitation prompting other qualified Muslim writers to follow her example, as a valuable service to Islam and the Muslims, and an affective refutation of disbelief and disbelievers!

May Allah bless the advocates of His Message!

**The Islamic Propagation Organization
International Relation Department**

For my children

**Husayn Ali, Fatimah, Mahdiyah, Hadi, Yasin and
Sakinah Aliyah, and my dear husband Ali Akbar with
all my love and prayers**

INTRODUCTION

Zeenat,s hazel eyes sparkled with laughter.Her long hair , usually black as night, now shone with henna and captured every ray of sunshine filtering into the lavishly decorated parlor.

When zeenat rose to enter the chamber where she was to be married, all the women and girls gasped. Her ivory bridal dress included layers upon layers of taffeta and satin and a train that dragged along the saffron, jade, peach and lavender Persian carpet. Her hands and arms up to the elbows,feet and ankles were decorated in intricate patterns with the bronze of henna adding beauty to her already deep complexion.

Everyone was decked out in their finest, including shaheedah although in a borrowed gown from her cousin, the bride. shaheedah in fact had snuck away from home because her parents would not have allowed her to attend the wedding.

She was from an extremely religious and traditional Muslim family . Her relatives, especially those on her mother's side, called them fanatics and shaheedah had even heard the word terrorist cross their lips. shaheedah's father was delivering a deathblow to the family,teaching them

crazy,dangerous things and keeping them backward. Even his own family, except for a few,thought him wacky, if not downright unbalanced. The arguing and name-calling among them all drove shaheedah crazy herself. That was why she tried to get away as often as she could. She yearned to be like zeenat, wealthy and gorgeous, caring only for how much she would accumulate. Shaheedah had nothing though - only a few clothes and some books. Her house was a shabby hovel in a dark poor area on the outskirts of the city of saimi in oil-rich Kuwait.

Every penny her father earned was given in charity and towards the Islamic movement. Shaheedah felt more pizazz around her affluent relatives. Their lives were lively and full off gossip. Plus the problems they moaned about seemed so insignificant. compared to hers.

Shaheedah hated the way her religion, Islam, wore on her. She had to wear a scarf and loose clothing, even around her male cousins. Her other relatives only did so on the streets, as it was the Law. She had to pray five times a day and fast the whole month of Ramadan from dawn to dusk. None of her rich relatives cared for these rituals. Many religious boys had already asked for her hand in marriage. She was terrified soon her father would marry her off. And she was only fourteen-and-a-half.

Shaheedah vowed, as she watched her cousin, that she would be successful too- a doctor perhaps - in America or England, and she definitely would not agree to be married until she was at least 25 . Yet as she dreamed of her future a strange pressure crushed her chest, forcing her in search of water.

She found it in an adjacent room . An old woman sat off to the side, reading the holy book ,

the Qur'an. Shaheedah watched her for a second, but the need for water overwhelmed her again. As she drank, the aged woman stood up to pray. She bowed and prostrated with great difficulty. She must be 90 years old, Shaheedah thought, and here she is alone praying while all the other guests are laughing and singing.

When the woman completed the prayer, she turned again to the Qur'an. "Sit beside me," she said. Shaheedah never knew she had been seen. "Read this." The old woman pointed a shriveled finger at verse.

Shaheedah looked at the woman. Her face was ravaged with age, but her eyes shone clear and true. They penetrated Shaheedah's body, scaring her and she turned to walk out of the room.

"Come. Read this," the woman repeated.

Something mysterious was in the room. Shaheedah found herself kneeling beside the old woman. She smiled a toothless grin and quickly whipped out a pure white scarf. Shaheedah draped it over her long black hair, barely managing to cover half of it.

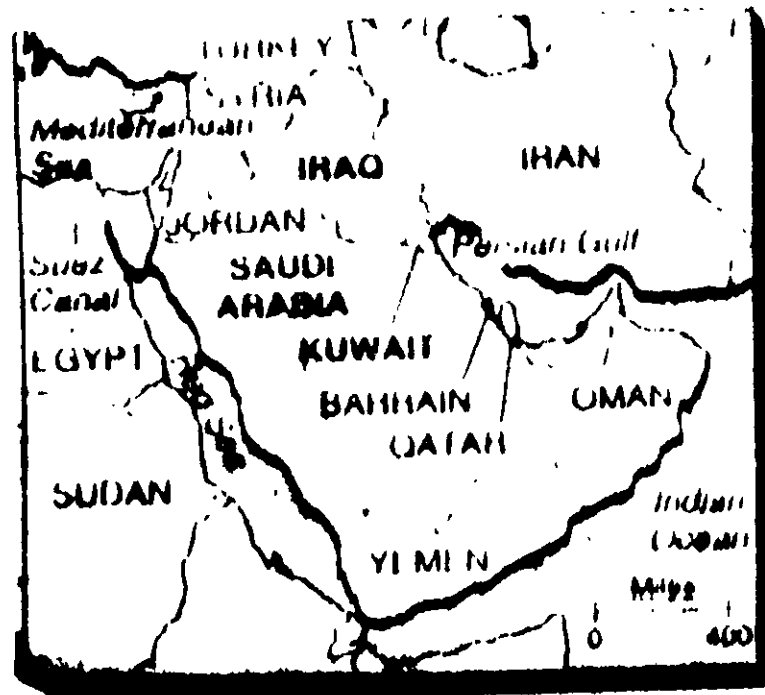
Shaheedah looked at the verse. She knew it well, and smiled too, as she read: "Verily, I am Allah. There is no god but I, therefore serve me and offer prayers to remember Me" (20:14)

The old woman turned a few pages and pointed. Shaheedah read: "Allah affirms that there is no god but He and so do the angels and those endowed with knowledge. He is standing firm in justice. There is no God but He the mighty, the wise" (3:17).

Shaheedah rose, folded the scarf and handed it to the old woman. Warm tears fell onto her cheeks. She went to change back into her worn clothes. She plaited her hair into one long braid that

reached half-way down her back and then twisted it into a knot at the nape of her neck. Shaheedah donned her own faded black scarf and looked at her reflection in the gold-rimmed mirror. Honey-brown eyes, large as moons, framed by luscious lashes and heavy black brows, stared back at her. Her face was smooth as ice and well-tanned by the hot Kuwaiti sun in a toasty sort of way. She was a ravishing beauty.

without saying a word to anyone shaheedah hurried straight home.



CHAPTER ONE

Moisture trickled from under the black scarf around shaheedah's head. The orange ball of sun lay low low in the west signalling sunset. only when it disappeared would she find some relief from the oppressive heat that usually reached 120 degrees fahrenheit in the shade.

She would not shed a tear. Why should she when she knew her young uncle was happy now? He had often spoken of death. Shaheedah watched as his unshrouded blood-stained body was put into the warm earth.

Amir had been her favorite, always there to listen to her and answer her unending questions. He made her feel grown-up. Even though he was a devout Muslim, he never pressured her. She would miss him.

Her father had found Amir's corpse outside the crumbling white wall surrounding her house. Someone - certainly the police - had thrown it there, before sunrise. Both his legs had been broken at the knees and his face had been severely beaten.

it was no surprise. Since Amir had turned twelve he had valiantly participated in the Islamic struggle to rid their country of the rulers who were suffocating the freedom of the Muslims. Only this time Amir had been picked up, carted off and returned in such a state as if to say, "This is your

fate if you insist on rebellion. Be warned!" He had not failed in shaheedah's mind, although she never really understood the politics behind the struggle. But she knew deep in her heart, he was right.

"we must leave now, shaheedah." Her mother touched her gently. Looking at realized she too had not cried. The patience and strength her mother emitted enveloped shaheedah. Only 35 years old, beautiful and fresh, shaheedah's mother was the essence of purity.

The *imam* (religious leader) was chanting verses from the Qur'an as four youth shovelled sun-bleached sand over Amir's body. Shaheedah found this the toughest. She would never see him again in this life. As she and her mother walked down the rock-strewn path, shaheedah heard the final words: "From Allah we come and to him we return."

Shaheedah found it difficult to sleep that night. Her mother and father were whispering, something they rarely did. Shaheedah drew her *ábā* (full-length veil) around her body and stood in the shadows behind the flowered curtain separating her tiny room from the rest of the house. The moon cast its light across the mat she slept on, revealing only a tattered blanket. Her few clothes were neatly folded on a wooden plank against the far wall and her two best outfits hung on nails above it. Muhammad and Abbas, her brothers, five and eight respectively, were sound asleep in the other room.

Careful not to make a sound shaheedah strained her ears to listen to her parents.

"But where will you go, Ahmad?" her mother asked.

"That I cannot say now, Faheemah," he answered.

For a long time they did not speak. Shaheedah guessed her father was holding her mother and

stroking her hair as she had often seen him do in the late evenings. Faheemah only let her silky hair out of its long braid for him. otherwise no man ever saw it .

where was her father going and why? Sometimes he was gone overnight but never for two in a row. Yet this sounded like he intended a long stay, Shaheedah thought.

" I know it will be very hard for you and the children while I'm away. Allah will help you. It will be your struggle. All of us must do our part and I am needed elsewhere more than here, "her father said.

His voice was heavy and gentle at the same time. Shaheedah could visualize his brawny body and large hands. His black hair and beard were just beginning to show tinges of gray. Everyone in the neighbourhood sought his advice, gathering at their house all hours of the day and night.

"After breakfast I'll tell the children good-bye. Now try to get some rest, my dear, " her father said.

Shaheedah stood still. Her father, their protector and guardian was leaving and he couldn't even tell his wife where. Whatever it was she knew it was very important. She squatted on the hard wood floor.

The call to prayer awoke shaheedah. She had fallen asleep on the floor and her body ached with stiffness. She felt cold and damp as she pulled her *ābā* tight. Shaheedah hurried to prepare for prayer. She washed her face and hands and brushed her teeth in the blue and white porcelain basin. Then she made her *wudu* (ablution). Her family always prayed their morning prayers together before the sun rose .

At breakfast her parents were nervous, anticipating her reaction to the news of her father's departure.

Shaheedah, yesterday I found out that I must leave you all for a while. I want you to help your mother with the boys, " her father said quietly.

" where are you going, father ? " she asked, knowing he would not say.

" I can't say right now. But you'll hear from me as soon as possible ..." All at once the door burst open! Two uniformed Kuwaiti policemen screamed: "Everybody freeze! Hands above your heads!"

" What's the meaning of this?" Shaheedah's father shouted.

" shut-up! We'll ask the questions, " one of them said pointing his rifle at Ahmad. " You are Ahmad Abdul-Wajid, right? Shaheedah's father did not answer.

" come with me! Now! the policeman ordered.

" If you want me, you'll have to take me, " Ahmad answered calmly.

The policeman grabbed him around the neck and threw him to the floor. The second one put his boot on Shaheedah's father's chest. She wanted to scream, "Stop! Get out!" but all she could do was watch.

"now! Let's go!" The policeman ground his heel into Ahmad's chest close to his neck, cutting off his air. His face turned an ugly red and he gasped for breath.

Shaheedah's mother started screaming. "Stop! Let him go ! He'll die if you continue. " the other policeman spat at her.

To Shaheedah's surprise the policeman took his boot off her father. He extended his hand and pulled Ahmad to his feet. With a gun in his back, the policemen marched him out the door to their jeep. They did not even let him say good-bye. Muhammad kept crying: "Where are you going, Father Please come back," but the policemen were

oblivious to his cries. Shaheedah, her mother and brothers stood in the dirt road and watched them drive away. They were absolutely helpless.

Faheemah fainted. Shaheedah tried to revive her but she only lay in the road. Muhammad and Abbas were clinging to each other in shock. Shaheedah heard a car approaching around the corner. Her heart skipped a beat. Were the policemen returning to get all of them? No, it was their neighbour, Yunus.

Yunus slammed on the brakes barely missing Faheemah as his car slid several feet. He jumped out and ran to the bewildered family. Yunus ran back to the car and grabbed a jug of water. Shaheedah sat her mother up and Yunus dripped some water onto her lips. It worked miraculously and Faheemah opened her eyes and drank a sip.

She tried to answer Yunus's questions but she could not speak. Shaheedah had to explain everything.



CHAPTER TWO

It took several days for Faheemah to gain her composure and strength. Without Khadijah, Yunus's wife and Shaheedah it would perhaps have been weeks. Everyone in the neighborhood brought food and helped with the chores. Shaheedah thought her mother was talking everything too seriously. She too needed comfort.

Exactly a week after Shaheedah's father had been accosted, in the early morning hours, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The whole thing took only five hours and when Shaheedah awoke it was all over. The country's ruler's had wind of the invasion beforehand and had scurried off in their private jets to neighboring Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqis came into tiny Kuwait on the pretext that in reality it belonged to them. It had, in fact, been portioned off as a separate country by the British in 1932. How the British could do such a thing escaped Shaheedah. All she knew was that her country was under occupation now. As her residence was miles from the Iraqi border, she did not feel the brunt of the invasion immediately.

Even though Ahmad was missing, the neighbours continued to gather at her house as usual. It was one of the central gathering places of the neighborhood, after Mohsin Abdul-Rasheed,s and the *Masjid* (Mosque),which had subsequently been

boarded up after the invasion. The radio played full-time but the news was mostly about the fate of the westerners trapped in Kuwait. They included diplomats and other embassy employees, technicians and executives, plus their families. Shaheedah grew weary of all the talk as she could not understand the whole thing. She had not even seen an Iraqi soldier.

Some days later, while sitting outside in the courtyard of her house reading, Shaheedah heard some neighborhood boys passing.

"Yes, that's true," one boy said, his voice filled with terror. "I heard that also."

"And what about the hospital in Kuwait City?" another asked. "Mothers who take their babies there for simple matters return home empty-handed. The babies' blood is being drained completely out of their bodies."

"O Allah!" one boy shouted.

"Yes, it's terrible. The babies die so that the soldiers will have blood." The boys were silent for a minute. Shaheedah was shivering, although it was very hot outside. How could a human being be so cruel, she wondered. "and did you hear about Idris's father?" she heard one of the boys say.

"No. What?" someone asked.

"The soldiers came to his house and arrested him yesterday."

"What will they do to him?" another boy asked.

They fell silent. Shaheedah knew the man they were speaking about. He had often visited their house. Then her thought turned to her own father. She stared blankly at the book in her hands, while the boys moved quietly down the street. The invasion's effects finally arrived in Shaheedah's town. One day she saw six Iraqi tanks plowing down her

street. Her mother no longer let them out of the house. Since Kuwait was now cut off from the rest of the world, things began to get scarce. It was becoming more and more difficult to obtain the things they needed - bread, rice, sugar and meat. Fresh vegetables were almost unheard of as well as milk.

The radio announced that the United States was sending in 250,000 troops to be stationed along the border of Kuwait in Saudi Arabia. Their reported intention was to keep Iraq from invading Saudi Arabia also. The neighbourhood talk was that Iraq could not and would not attack Saudi Arabia. Their army was too small and Saudi Arabia was huge, about 120 times larger than Shaheedah's country.

Everyday the neighbors were disappearing, like Shaheedah's father. Her father had been arrested by the Kuwaiti police, but these Muslims were being picked up by the Iraqi soldiers. The schools were boarded up and several homes had been demolished as punishment for those presumed to be sheltering Muslim activists. Shaheedah knew the men who discussed religion and politics at her home were against the Kuwaiti government and she did not understand why the Iraqis would care about them. In fact, if the Iraqis had invaded Kuwait, then they were against the Kuwaiti government also or so she assumed.

During the next several days, she saw plenty of Iraqis. They were bold and arrogant. Often they had threatened Shaheedah's mother, terrifying the boys and leering at Shaheedah in a gross way. They broke into people's homes and stole food and whatever they wanted whenever they wanted. The whole country was in chaos. Almost all of Shaheedah's wealthy relatives had gotten out of the

country, via Saudi Arabia, to Europe. But financially that was impossible for Shaheedah's family. One afternoon Shaheedah's mother confided in her only daughter.

"Shaheedah, the situation is desperate. We must seek some advice," She said.

"Get your brothers dressed."

Shaheedah quickly prepared her brothers to go out. She felt strange as she left the courtyard because none of the family had been outside its gates in weeks.

As they approached the dusty alley leading to Mohsin Abdul-Rasheed's house, a group of men passed them in quite a hurry. Another small group passed them heading away from the house.

What are all these men doing, Shaheedah wondered.

Mohsin Abdul-Rasheed was a man of great distinction. He had studied in Qum, Iran, under Ayatullah Khomeini in the late fifties. Family matters had unexpectedly forced him to return to Kuwait where he became unable to complete his studies in theology. However, he was very learned and respected in Shaheedah's community.

His house was a hub-bub of activity. Groups of men, Young and old, were gathered throughout the courtyard engaged in lively discussions. Faheemah and her children were enthusiastically welcomed by Mohsin's youngest son, Jafar. Although Jafar was only in his early twenties, he carried himself like a man full of responsibility and understanding. Worried about all the commotion around her, Shaheedah paid him no attention.

"My father will be with you in a few minutes," Jafar said. Around the room five older men sat in a circle on the floor. Tea brewed in a lavishly

decorated brass *samovar* (kettle) in the center on a small wooden table inlaid with tiny pieces of ivory mother of pearl. Books and papers were scattered around them. Shaheedah could not help listening to their conversation.

"Iraq only invaded our country to give the United States an excuse to move into these lands," a thin bearded man Hamid said.

"That's right! The U.S. had to come in to destroy the Islamic movement itself," a man with glasses said. "Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the US has been trying to get in."

"Yes, Lateef. Iraq invaded and fought Iran for eight years. But why didn't the US go into Iran to push Iraq out?" Hamid asked sarcastically. "Why are they so concerned with the sovereignty and freedom of Kuwait?"

A third balding man, Ali, interjected, "And what about the freedom of our Palestinian brothers and sisters? Why doesn't the US go in and stop Israel from taking over their land?"

Shaheedah watched as they nodded, rubbing their beards. She had heard talk like this before. Yet this time it was real as she was involved in the catastrophe, not simply an outside observer in a far-away place. The ideas of the Muslim neighbors were quite opposite of the news on the radio. Shaheedah was puzzled.

The US gave Saddam of Iraq the green light to invade Kuwait so that he can establish a permanent military foothold in the Middle East in the heartland of the Muslim lands - the Arabian peninsula, "one of the men who had not spoken yet said

"That's right, Kalim," Hamid said. "Muslims fighting Muslims always looks good to the west. Iraqis killing Kuwaitis and Kuwaitis in need of US protection

simply is like killing many birds with one stone."

"Saddam is all over the news as a Muslim revolutionary espousing jihad (Holy war) and a madman at the same time," the last of the five, Ali, exclaimed. "Yes, the most muslims rulers are dictators, terrorists, revolutionary fanatics and weak in defence. But the west will not prevail." Kalim said.

At that point Mohsin entered the room and all the men rose.

"*As-Salaamu Alaikum*(peace be on you),"he said .

"*Wa Alaikum Salaam*(And on you be peace),"the chorus sounded.

"Oh my dear sister Faheemah," Mohsin said as he sat several feet away from the family. "what can I do for you?"

" We are in a state as are all of us but with Ahmad gone..."

" Yes, I see. Do you wish to live here with my family? My wife would love having you?" he asked.

"Oh no. I couldn't impose."

"Perhaps you would like to leave altogether?"

"Could that be arranged?" Faheemah asked.

"Yes. Wait here for a few minutes."

Mohsin rose and all the men Stood up. As he left the room, they continued their talk.

"When Kuwait only exported pearls, no one cared for us," Ali began. "But now it's oil."

"The west speaks of Kuwait's freedom and democracy, but they know this country is not a democratic society. It's medieval tribalism at its worst, " Hamid explained. "Now Saddam is the ,butcher of Baghdad.' But no one called him that when the west was supplying him with arms and technology when he was fighting Iran. It was only

the Muslims that were screaming out against his atrocities" Lateef added. "We cannot allow the US to establish a military base next to the holy shrines of Makkah and Medina. They created their cancer, Israel, in the holy land of palestine and we will not allow them to further pollute our Islamic lands," Hamid vowed. "Yes, but we will establish Islamic States in all the Muslim Lands, *inshá Allah* (God willing)" one of the men said.

"The US is here to fight Islam, not Iraq!" Kalim shouted.

But shaheedah found this explanation a little bit paranoid.



CHAPTER THREE

"It is time. Shaheedah's mother nudged her gently out of a deep sleep. It was still pitch black but Shaheedah knew it would be dawn in a couple of hours. As her mother woke the boys, she dressed and rolled her few belongings up in her blanket.

Yunus would drive them to the border, where there was a small trail leading into Saudi Arabia. Her mother had painfully decided they must escape to that country if they were to survive.

Kuwait is only 1300 square miles and Yunus figured it would take only an hour to reach the border. As they drove they saw burned-out tanks' cars and trucks scattered everywhere. Their charred remains were like ghosts in the crisp air beckoning the curious to venture closer.

"When Iraq invaded they took over quickly," Yunus said. "The Kuwaiti army was no match for them and the Iraqis blew up and burned down everything in their path."

Shaheedah thought about her home and felt sad. What was ahead for them? she wondered. Would they ever see their father again?

Yunus switched off the headlights. "Everybody lie down," he ordered. Faheemah shoved the boys

onto the floor and she and Shaheedah lay across each other on the back seat. Muhammad started to speak' but his mother clamped her hand over his mouth. "Don't say a word' "she whispered.

The car pulled to a stop. Yunus too laid down on the front seat. Shaheedah could hear nothing. Why was he stopping? It seemed like an hour before Yunus sat up, looked around and said, "It's alright now. But for safety it's better you remain hidden."

"What was it?"Fahmeemah asked.

"I saw some headlights ahead' coming straight at us. I believe it was Iraqi soldiers. We must hurry if we are going to reach the border before sunrise. " He stepped on the gas' but left the lights off just in case.

out of nowhere' blinding lights flooded the car. Yunus swerved to the left' trying to get away from their source.

"Halt! " A booming voice yelled. Several gunshots pounded the car.

Yunus raced forward. Shaheedah ventured a peek out the rear window. someone was hanging out the passenger side of an Iraqi army jeep with a machine-gun aimed at them. Frightened' she scrambled onto the floor and grabbed one of her brothers. "They're gaining on us, Yunus "she heard her mother say.

Yunus tossed a pistol over the seat to her. Fahmeemah picked it up' holding it confidently. Shaheedah had never seen her mother with a gun.

" If you need to' use it " he said. "I have another."

the jeep bounded towards them. Yunus tried to throw them off by making a quick right' but the car slid on the sandy road. As they skidded' a second

jeep loomed ahead. Yunus was forced to stop or crash. He bolted out of the car' in an attempt to distract the soldiers from his passengers.

"Get away! " he yelled back to Faheemah.

Faheemah knew her family's safety was what he wanted. She crawled over the seat and sped away from the scene. The Iraqis were chasing Yunus through like a hunted deer through the sand' periodically turning and firing a single shot in his pursuers' direction. Then she saw him fly straight up into the air and land hard on the ground. He had been shot dead. She turned and touched her mother on the shoulder. Faheemah understood. Shots fired endlessly and Shaheedah knew his body was being riddled with bullets.

Faheemah drove on' energized by fear and anger' until they reached the border. Shaheedah bent down' scooped up some golden sand and carefully placed it in a small bottle she had in her pocket.

This land where she was born was mostly sand and scraggly shrubs. Only after oil was discovered under the shifting sand-hills did Kuwait change. The changes were devastating to the average citizen, for Kuwait literally moved overnight from a lonely desert to a bustling metropolis. The influx of western technicians to monitor and control the oil brought western culture - pop songs, lewd clothes, corruption and crime.

"The sun will be up soon, " Shaheedah's mother said. "We should try to get over the border before it rises."

Shaheedah took Muhammad and Abbas by the hand They trudged over a rocky path leading towards the west - to Saudi Arabia. It was eerie. No one spoke in the waning darkness.

Somewhere something growled. A huge ashen

monster lunged' at Abbas, tossing him to the ground. Shaheedah screamed and thrashed at the dog. Its jaws were clenched in a death-grip on her brother's thigh.

"Help me !" Abbas screamed. "Get it off !"

A shot rung out. The dog was lifted up by the force of the bullet. It landed with a thud across Abbas's stomach' pinning him down. Blood dripped from the dog's mouth. A peculiar' dishevelled man appeared from behind a shrub and kicked the dead animal off Abbas.

"That's a mighty nasty bite" the man said, kneeling down to examine Abbas's leg. He picked up the end of his patched dirty cloak and tore off a long strip. Tying it securely around Abbas's leg the stranger glanced up at Faheemah, fingering his tangled beard. She quickly turned away.

"There's a Christian man about two miles that way." He pointed northwest. "I know you're heading over the border, " he said very casually." if I were you" he looked at Faheemah again' I'd get your boy's leg attended to . The christian will help."

Faheemah did not answer. She looked to the east. Prayers had not been said and soon the sun would rise. Allah would not like them to miss the prayers.

As soon as we pray' we will see the christian man. We need some water for *wudu* , Faheemah told the man.

"You won't find enough for *wudu* here , but there is plenty of sand. " His loud laughter turned into a laboured cough. Shaheedah was startled. "Mother' you pray first and I'll watch the boys, "she said' caressing Abbas's forehead.

"Yes only two cycles and then you'll pray. We must have Abbas's leg examined" her mother said'

striking her palms on the sand for *tayammum* (dry ablution).

With an uneasy feeling, Shaheedah watched the man as he scrutinized her mother. He must be destitute' a vagrant. Would he harm them now that he saw they were a simple religious family?

She wished she had the pistol. When the dog was killed, Shaheedah thought it had been her mother's work. she must have left it in the car, she realized.

The old man stood up and hoisted his rifle over his shoulder. Shaheedah stood up also, her back to the boys, arms outstretched in a protective gesture. The man's eyes misted over and he simply strolled back to where he came from.

On their way at last, Shaheedah and her mother took turns helping Abbas. His leg was bleeding profusely and He couldnot put any weight on it. The border crossing became visible - a simple barbed wire fence. The family climbed through carefully, easing Abbas before them. They were in Saudi Arabia.

Shaheedah sifted the sand through her fingers. Same color, same texture. Identical! she thought.

There is no difference between here and there, "she said to her mother.

" All that is different is that there is barbed wire."

" Yes, my dear," her mother answered. "Kuwait is really no different from Saudi Arabia or Iraq. When the British and French were in control of the Muslim lands, they marked them up and parcelled out land to various rulers. And, of course, you know they created Israel in Palestine. All of the area is Muslim land,only with various names and rulers.

The firm knowledgeable reassured Shaheedah. She had heard them all before, but now she was

experiencing them herself. She took Abbas under his arm and around his waist and set off in a northwesterly direction.

As the sun rose behind them, the world came alive. Birds chirped and various desert creatures beetles like tanks and as big as mice; red , brown and green scorpion;s pit and horned vipers - stirred, eager to be up and out, knowing soon it would be too hot. Walking was strenuous for Abbas so Shaheedah and her mother interwoved their arms to form a chair. Muhammad was barely stragglng along, more interested in watching a hawk soaring high overhead than keeping up with his mother.

When they felt they could not go on, they caught sight of a huge flag. It hung very high from a pole and sputtered around intermittently in the stagnant air. Hastening forward, her feet sinking into the sand up to her ankles, Shaheedah recognized from its colors - red, white and blue - that it was an American flag.

It flew above a small camp. A gigantic cross was thrust deep into the sand in the center of the camp. A wooden sign - in Arabic and English - crudely painted in dark brown paint, read: "Christian Mission 1990 - to administer to the religious needs of our boys in combat (USA). "Ten olive-colored tents encircled a larger, more dominant one .

The family stood staring at the camp, as if It were a mirage. Abbas whimpered slightly and Muhammad, exhausted, hung around his mother's feet.

A young man in khakis came out of one of the tents and headed for the central one. He spied the family of four,standing forlorn and desperate.

" Hey, Mike, Bruce! come see what we've got here!"he yelled.

CHAPTER FOUR

Shaheedah picked Abbas up and started fleeing away from the camp. Her blood was racing through her body so fast she thought her head would explode. Frantic, she stumbled head over heels, sending her brother flying.

"Hey, you there!" someone called out. "Don't be afraid."

A girl' about her own age " with golden hair hanging down her back, scampered up to her. Their eyes met and shaheedah found herself mesmerized by their cool blueness. Although she was dressed in a sleeveless pink blouse and white shorts, the sun had not tanned her very much. Shaheedah had never seen such a pale face' except ofcourse in western magazines. Perhaps the girl was sickly and allergic to the sun , she thought. Shaheedah was so enthralled at the girl she did not notice the soldier squatting beside her.why did You run? the girl asked. we won't bite.

The American soldier said, "That's pretty funny,Mary . I think that's exactly what's happened. This boy has been seriously bitten. Bring the first-aid kit on the double."

Mary raced back to the tents. She returned in a flash with an older man lugging a huge metal box.

Shaheedah and her mother watched as the elder

man unwrapped the blood-drenched cloth from Abbas's leg and threw it aside. The wounded looked dreadful.

"He needs some penicillin. Run back and ask Agnes to come with it" the man said to Mary. He doused the area with alcohol. Abbas screamed out in pain.

"This is a dog bite' isn't it?" he asked in broken Arabic.

"yes," Shaheedah's mother answered in English. The man looked up at her in surprise. She and her family spoke good English as it had been taught as the second language in Kuwait for years.

"Was it foaming at the mouth?" he asked, switching to English.

"No, I don't think so."

"Perhaps your son- he is yours, isn't he?" the man asked in a rude manner, should get the rabies shot Is that alright with you?"

Shaheedah's mother looked worried. "I don't think the dog had rabies. He was probably just starved like all of us have been since the invasion," she answered defiantly. The man glanced up again at her to see just who he was dealing with.

The woman, Agnes, jolted over with an IV drip and a bag of clear liquid. She was also dressed in khakis and looked much like a man her muscles hard Her brown hair was chopped short and her nose protruded large and ugly. Shaheedah guessed she was around 50.

"Even if you don't agree with the rabies treatment, your boy must take this unit of medicine. I insist," the man said sternly. "It will help prevent infection and heal the wound."

"I see," Faheemah said.

Agnes and the other soldier hooked up the IV

and inserted the needle in Abbas's arm. Then they helped him walk to one of the tents.

"please wait here for awhile. Mary and I will bring you some food," Agnes said, annoyance seeping through her husky voice.

Mary handed some water to Abbas. He sipped it and passed it to his brother. The family looked around the tent. It was bare except for seven army cots which were set up in two rows. They all fell swiftly into a deep sleep.

Shaheedah awoke to find Mary peering intently at her face.

"Who are you?" Mary asked.

"Who are you?" Shaheedah redirected the question.

"I am Mary. MY father is the priest for the US army which is stationed not far from here."

"Why are you needed here." Shaheedah blurted out.

"We hold services for the soldiers and assist in other ways," Mary said, not understanding Shaheedah's angry tone.

"This is a Muslim country and you, your father and the army should pack up and go home." Shaheedah sat up and stared right in Mary's eyes. She was surprised at her own words.

"The Saudi government asked us in to defend them against the Iraqi army. We had to come to protect the region."

"This is our region and it is no concern of yours. We can defend ourselves." Shaheedah was angry at the girl's arrogance. Yet she felt a stab of conscience.

she had never voiced concern for the Muslims' rights before, even to her own supportive family .

"How can you say that? All you Arabs ever do is fight each other," Mary retorted.

" We ve never had an all -out war against one

another once . It 's you- the united states - who ' ve had so many wars you can't even count them. off the top of my head I can name several - civil war I and II, Korean war Vietnam war. You want to police the whole world' " Shaheedah said bitterly' regurgitating facts she had heard her father say.

Mary was taken aback. She had never been confronted before.

"But if Iraq invades Saudi Arabia" She tried to make a point "they could stop the oil flow."

"so what!" Shaheedah exclaimed."It's our oil, not yours. You are only the customers. And customers have no right defending what's being sold to them. The owners have to do that alone."

"But we need your oil," Mary said.

"No kidding . The US gobbles at least eight million barrels of oil a day." She was astounded at the Facts her mind had retained just listening to her neighbors's discussions with her parents.

The tent flaps swung open and Agnes came in carrying a large tray of food. Shaheedah cast a glance at Mary.How had this argument begun? she never intended to tell this girl these things. Maybe it was because of the upsetting day she had with Yunus' death and the whole escape ordeal' she thought .

"Shaheedah," her mother said. "Never mind those things now .Let's eat."

She winked at daughter, proud of her stand for Islam.

CHAPTER FIVE

Shaheedah's family started out into the steamy, bareen desert in the late afternoon. She was not sure where they were headed but anywhere was better than around that obnoxious Mary, she thought. Some relatives were supposed to be in a village about 20 miles away, but Faheemah had not heard from them in many years and she did not know if they were still there.

Agnes gave Faheemah and Shaheedah each a heavy saddle-bag full of flat bread, goat cheese and dried dates, plus two large jugs of water which they hung from a rope around their waists. Abbas could not help because of his leg and Muhammad was too young.

After walking for less than an hour, Faheemah called the group to a halt. The heat was sweltering and Abbas was complaining of his leg. Everyone had a long refreshing swig of water.

"we will pray here," Faheemah said.

Shaheedah made *wudu* with sand again. They had to preserve their precious water. She prayed first while her mother watched the boys in the foreign environment. Shaheedah sat awhile after the prayers and asked Allah for guidance and help. Feeling His Mercy, she felt more confident of their fate.

Getting up, Shaheedah was aware of a strange

presence. Two men were sitting on the ground a few feet from her mother and the boys. Their long white robes were dusty and around their heads a turban was held in place with a thick black cord. The men were certainly bedouins - nomads who lived off the land.

Shaheedah walked to her mother. The bedouins stroked their long beards and poked their sticks into the sand, drawing circles and other figures. Two light brown dromedary camels sat behind the men, quietly chewing their cud. Their smug, pompous expression reminded Shaheedah of the saying that while Muslims only know 99 of the 100 names of Allah, the camel knows the hundredth, hence its facial expression, denoting its importance.

"Where did the bedouins come from?" she asked her mother.

"Allah sent them to help us, " she answered. "After I pray, we will go with them."

As soon as Faheemah completed her prayer the bedouins stood walked a distance towards the west and sat again. Faheemah helped Abbas and Muhammad onto one of the camels. They sat behind its single hump - not on it like people imagine. The saddle-bags and water jugs were tied to the camels.

" You ride on the other one Shaheedah, " her mother said.

"No. You should ride. I will be fine walking " Shaheedah answered.

As soon as Faheemah positioned herself on the camel, one of the bedouins whistled and the camels rose in a jerky motion. Faheemah almost fell off. She held tight to the rope running through its nose.

Up and down, up and down, the camels lurched through the wasteland. The hump made it difficult to stay on because it was in the way. Many times

Shaheedah had to stop the procession and reposition her brothers .

The desert dragged on endlessly. Shaheedah could see nothing but sand. It Whipped her face so fiercely she had to adjust her scarf so only her eyes were exposed. Her mother had done the same and the boys were wrapped completely up in their red and white *kuffiyahs* (large scarves). It was unbearably hot and Shaheedah's feet were scorched through her leather sandals. Not a single creature had ventured out in this heat except them, she realized. Shaheedah tried to find something to take her mind off the sun. She marvelled how in places the wind had blown in one direction so long and hard it had created magnificent sand dunes each one unique and beautiful.

Up ahead Shaheedah saw several black dots. one of the bedouins let out a yell and all at once the camels galloped at top speed. the sudden jolt sent Faheemah flying and she landed with a thud on the ground, motionless.

Shaheedah ran to her mother. One of the bedouins crouched besides them while the other chased the runaway camel . The boys' camel had run on ahead. When the bedouin caught Faheemah's camel they put Faheemah over its back and walked briskly towards the black objects. They were a circle a of goat-hair tents with others scattered. around. Several women, dressed in colorfully patterned long- sleeved blouses, flowing ankle-length skirts and scarves, took Faheemah inside a tent.

She was unconscious but some warm, strong, black tea revived her.

"I have a sharp pain here, " Faheemah moand, holding her belly.

One of the women told her to lie back. She

gently felt Faheemah's abdomen. Then she noticed the blood. Faheemah's dress was soaked with redness.

"Are you pregnant?" asked the woman.

"What?" Faheemah asked in a daze. "Yes, yes." Her voice drifted in and out. It was clear to everyone she was in extreme pain.

"Call Batul," the woman said. The bedouin women looked at each other with anxiety. Someone started reciting verses from the Qur'an. The air was stiff with fear. Shaheedah was in shock thinking that her mother might die along with a baby she had just learned about.

"Shaheedah," her mother called. "If I die I want you to know I love you very, very much."

"But mother," Shaheedah interrupted.

"Let me finish, dear," her mother whispered, her voice faltering. "You are the strongest, most courageous, kindest and most truthful girl I know. You will be successful and happy in your life. Do whatever Allah asks." Faheemah's eyes rolled back.

"Quick!" Shaheedah screamed. "My mother is dying!"

Suddenly the tent flaps parted and Shaheedah watched as a small, old woman advanced. She motioned for Faheemah to be placed with her feet facing Makkah - the same direction as for prayers. The old woman, her hands frail and bony, sat Faheemah up and brought a mahogany wooden goblet to her lips. The strong brew permeated the tent so that even Shaheedah could taste it. One sip and Faheemah began sputtering and coughing. The old woman smiled.

"Give her a few sips every ten minutes," mumbled as she left.

"What is that stuff?" Shaheedah asked one of the women.

"It's a special tea midwives use to prevent miscarriages," the bedouin woman said. "That old lady is our oldest and most experienced midwife. She has caught over 2,000 babies. Women come from many miles near the end of their pregnancies just so she can assist them."

"That's wonderful." Shaheedah was genuinely impressed.

"Your mother will be fine. She will not die now, *insha'allah* (Allah willing)."

Some roasted lamb, parsley, more flat bread and tea was brought in. Shaheedah had a hearty meal. She figured her brothers were being well taken care of with the men. Sleep fell on her like a welcome friend.

As the days passed, Abbas's leg returned to normal but Faheemah remained ill. She had no appetite nor could she get out of bed. The pain was immense. Every time she tried to stand it would literally knock her down. She was very pale and drawn and lost at least ten pounds. Nothing the midwife tried was working.

The boys were unaware of their mother's plight. They spent their time in the company of the men and boys, assured their mother was fine and only resting from their ordeal. Shaheedah was a little envious of their freedom and innocence. She watched from a distance as they helped to milk the goats and tend the camels and sheep. They were even learning how to use falcons for hunting.

All the older boys in the camp had at least one falcon. When they wanted to send it hunting, they would place a black hood over its head and strong curved beak. The Falcon would sit up on the boy's heavy leather glove, proud and elegant, his long sickle shaped talons at ease. As soon as the

hood was lifted it would fly into the sky looking for prey. The hawk-like falcon did not soar but rapidly stroked its wing. When it spotted a bustard or other small animal, it would swiftly dive down and strike, holding the quarry until the boy arrived. Usually the falcon was awarded with one bite of its prey.

Shaheedah loved to watch the falcons fly and swoop. It was very beautiful and she understood why the boys loved their falcons so much. It was a purposeful sport and had a rich history; the Europeans during the crusades took falconry back to Europe from the Middle East. It had begun in Iran 4,000 years ago .

The boys also spent a couple of hours in the morning reading the Qur'an . In the bedouin camp, boys spent all their early education with the qur'an. Most boys were able to complete it between seven and nine years of age.

The majority of the time shaheedah assisted the women in cooking, sewing and cleaning. All the cooking was done over an open fire. It was amazing how many tasty dishes, rice combinations, lamb, vegetables and breads could be prepared from a few main ingredients and numerous spices and in so crude a fashion. she was also fascinated how the women could use nuts, roots and flowers to dye wool and cloth to make exquisite rugs, carpets and clothes.

looms were set up under the shade of several palm trees and the women and girls as old as 12 worked at the carpets. It took ten sheep to produce enough wool for a 16 square-foot rug with around 40,000 knots. The wool was washed in well water after all the burrs and debris were removed. It was important to wash out the dirt and lanolin

otherwise the dye would not take well . Shaheedah helped the older women their hands snarled and calloused useless for weaving due to arthritis wash hang and card the wool . It was a tough and sweaty job.

Shaheedah watched as the oldest woman spun the wool. In thier late eighties and above some used drop spindles while others used spinning wheels. Those hand spinning felt it superior to the wheel since it produced a looser yarn exposing more surface to the dye and the knots.

Dyeing the yarn skeins was another simmering task. First the skeins were wetted and immersed in a bath of mordant which formed flakes on the yarn, much like rust does so the dye could penetrate better. The best mordant Shaheedah was told was alum a mineral salt for a brilliant hue with small amounts of copper added to increase the color's lightfastness.

The bedouins have a passion for color as their dyes witnessed. They were reduced from nature - madder roots for a bright red a cantaloupe flesh color or a lovely amethyst; dyer's weld or dried daisies for a mustard yellow; oak galls for a deep dark blue; indigo plus daisy for a vibrant green and indigo for a lushious light blue. Of course colors could be mixed to create various hues and everytime the dyes were made the exact same colors were not unlike chemical dyes. That made it all the more exciting for Shaheedah, who wondered what shade would be produced each time and how the colors would blend in the carpet. Yet it was difficult to make a bad color combination she realized.

Weavers used patterns handed down to them by their families. The older woman had learned at least

20 designs by heart. If Someone worked for around eight hours at the loom she could tie 5,000 knots . But these bedouin women did not have such an uninterrupted day. Usually each woman made only one or two carpets in a season. Some were used by the bedouins or given as gifts to the mosques but most were sold at nearby villages . Pay was determined by the number of knots .The carpets went fast. They were part of the minute five percent of naturally dyed creations on the market . To Shaheedah the finished carpets sparkled and vibrated. There was a magical fascination and spiritual overtone in the patterns of unwritten history.

Sometimes she remembered her confrontation with the christian girl, Mary .There were no girls her age in the bedouin settlement. Shaheedah was very lonely in this strange place and she deeply missed her father.

CHAPTER SIX

One steamy afternoon Abbas came running up to Shaheedah as she was hanging up clothes to dry . She was surprised to see him. Sometimes days at a time she would only see her brothers from a distance.

"Shaheedah!" Abbas was very excited.

"Yes, Abbas .What is it ?" She touched his head tenderly.

"Abdullah and Abdul-Malik are going to take us out with the falcons"he exclaimed.

" Out where?" Shaheedah asked curiously.

Far out in the desert. But they said we must get permission from Mother.Where is she ?"

" I 'll go and ask her. She is resting."

She 's still resting. why is she so tired? Is she alright ? " he asked."She is older than us you know . Everything has been difficult for her . But She will be fine .You wait here and I'll ask her for you. "Shaheedah tried to sound calm.

Her mother lay very still in the bed .Her breathing was shallow and her color did not look good.

Mother ," Shaheedah said softly.

Her mother opened her eyes and stared through Shaheedah.

Are you alright ,mother ?"

"Yes ,dear ." Her voice was dreamy.

" I think I should call Batul," Shaheedah said .

"No , Shaheedah .leave me in peace."She closed her eyes again.

Shaheedah darted out of the tent. As she ran past Abbas she remembered his request.

"She said yes," she shouted, running as fast as she could.

"Hey ," he called . "I wanted you to hear my riddle."

"Later."

She stopped outside Batul's tent and asked permission to enter. After briefly explaining the situation, Batul and Shaheedah hurried to Faheemah.

As Batul examined her , Shaheedah knew something was wrong. Batul nodded at her to come outside .

"You know that mission you were at before ?" Batul asked.

Shaheedah nodded.

You must return and fetch a doctor . You must explain it is life or death.I will send my grandson and his wife with you ."

But what if the doctor won't come " Shaheedah asked .

"He 'll come .You must go now."

The trip back to the mission seemed much shorter to Shaheedah.For one thing she was riding a camel this time . Also she was anxious to see Mary again . This visit she thought I willl be as nice as I can to her .

Batul's grandson rode ahead since he knew the way. Although the bedouins appeared unaware of the outside world, shaheedah knew they absorbed plenty . She was surprised how soon they reached

the mission .

Shaheedah spied Mary by the well and waved to her. Mary ran over to her.

"How are you? Long time no see," Mary said .

"I'm fine and how are you doing?" Shaheedah replied .

"What's up?"

"My mother is very sick and she needs a doctor right away."

"Oh dear . I'll get my father . He 's a doctor," Mary said .she ran off towards the central tent .

When he came out of the tent, he had a medical bag with him. Shaheedah wondered how he could be a doctor *and* a preacher. She wondered what else he could do .

"Can you come with us, Mary ?" Shaheedah desired her company."Yes ,I can come. Father needs my assistance because Agnes is away."

Mary too rode a camel. She looked uncomfortable and awkward but Shaheedah was sure it was not her first time .

"How did your mother get sick? Reverend O'Brien asked.

"When we left here before she fell off a camel. She is pregnant and it seems that she will lose the baby," Shaheedah explained.

"But that was several months ago . Why did you come so late for help? Mary's father was upset.

"A midwife - a qualified one - was attending to her , but she failed to respond to the treatment . The midwife herself sent me to get you ," Shaheedah said .you should have come at the first signs of illness. His voice rung with superiority.

And what if I had? " Shaheedah bit back." And what if she'd remained ill all the same? Then what ? It is Allah who heals . Doctors can only do

so much.

"She was shocked at the way she spoke to the American man . He was taken aback also and rode off in silence. Mary , too, was surprised . She had never heard anyone speak to her father that way let alone a girl her age . She watched shaheedah in her scarf and long dress blowing back as she rode . Underneath she wore baggy pants and her feet were shod in sandals . Where did she get so much courage to talk like she did Mary wondered . Looking at her one would think her simple and uneducated.However, Mary envied the knowledge of this Arab girl.

Shaheedah and Mary sat together outside Faheemah's tent while the doctor and Batul examined her . Every few minutes a group of women pass by and suck their teeth at mary.

" Why are they doing that?" Mary finally asked .

" I guess because you are not covered up properly.All women must be covered to live here, shaheedah explained. " They probably think you are a prostitute."

" But they must know I am a preacher's daughter."

" Even a preacher's daughter could be a prostitute, you know, " Shaheedah said.

" Have you always lived here ? " Mary asked.

"no . I 'm from Kuwait . We 've been living with these bedouins since that day we left your mission " Shaheedah said.

" Why did you leave your home and come here?"

" Don't you know ? " Shaheedah asked.

" No ."Mary was serious. Could she really be that stupid Shaheedah wondered.

" We were not safe at home plus there was no food . There is no government left in Kuwait. It is only chaos there .We had no choice."

" But isn't it hard living like this ? Mary waved her hand around in a circle .

" I could ask you the same thing . You must be missing your flush toilets' running water, TV, stereo , maybe even the servants, " Shaheedah said sarcastically.

Mary was visibly hurt. " Why are you so mean to me ?"

Shaheedah stared at Mary's face . Her own turned a crimson red . Why was she being so rude? She had not wanted to talk that way . Perhaps the hautiness of her wealthy relatives had rubbed off on her like her parents had always warned . Shaheedah reached over and took hold of Mary's hands.

" I'm really sorry ."

" That 's ok." Mary was touched . " Let's talk about something else . " But neither one could think of anything to say.

" Hey , isn't that your brother ?" Mary asked. Abbas was strolling towards them .

" I remember you , " he said. " You helped me when I got bit by that dog."

" That's right . how is your leg now?" Mary asked.

" Oh , I'm fine . Shaheedah ,you should have seen the falcons today. It was great."

" Yeah. I wish I could have been there " Shaheedah said.

Let me tell You that riddle now, he said,excitedly.

" Let's hear it."

" What gets bigger the more you take out of it and smaller the more you put in it ?" Abbas asked.

Shaheedah knew he had heard the riddle from the men when they sat around the fire at night . They were always telling funny jokes riddles and stories from the Quran or just listening to the

news on their lone transistor radio.

" I don't know,"she said ." Do you know,Mary"

" No I don't know either. Tell us the answer ,"
Mary said .

" A hole! he exclaimed.And they all laughed .
Gotta go . See you." Abbas ran off again.

" It must be neat having two brothers " Mary
said . " I'm the only child."

" Yes , I love them very much. But it must be
nice being the only one and getting all the attention."

" Well , I do feel special . I 've been able to
travel all over the world with my father. I 've been
to Africa, Europe and Asia and seen alot of things
Maybe if there were more of us I wouldn't have
been able to do that?"

" Is Agnes your mother?" Shaheedah asked
carefully, almost certain Agnes could be no one's
mother, as manish as she looked.

" No " Mary laughed . Then seriously, she said
"My Mother died When I Was Two . " She looked
off. " Since then it's been me and my father."

" You know, Mary, You don't look anything like
your father. He has blackhair and your's is blonde.
You must favour your mother ."

" Not really ," Mary said . " She was dark-haired
also and very petite . I don't look like her at all.
I'm already 5,5 ". I don't know who I Look like . It's
always puzzled me." She hung her head in thought.
Then she said , so Where's your father?"

" He was arrested about six months ago. We
haven't heard from him since."

" Why was he arrested ?"

" For no reason really . He was in the
resistance movement against the government, "
Shaheedah defended her father.

" You mean he's on the Iraqi side ?" Mary asked

warily ." No way. He's against Iraq invading our country. And he's against the despots, too."

" But your rulers brought you much advancement . Don't you agree ?" Mary asked .She was confused.

" Oil brought our country money but the rulers took the wealth for themselves. They squandered the resources and made agreements with the west which were against Islam. In fact, the west got the lion's share of the oil and Kuwait got the scraps . The rulers do not obey the laws of Islam and that is why we are against them. Only the people who agreed with their policies received some of the oil wealth." Shaheedah couldn,t believe her own ears. she was speaking about her rich relatives .She had never thought of them that way before.

" What laws of Islam don't they follow?" Mary asked ." They are Muslims, aren't they?"

" Muslims don't oppress other Muslims . Muslims don't waste resources! They don't drink and gamble and go to night clubs and disobey Allah's laws. They don't sell their country to non - Muslims."

" And your rulers do all those things?" Mary asked.

Yes shaheedah answered. Are Yon sure? Like I said.

Shaheedah pointed out.

" Maybe they want to live like this ," Mary said .

" Or maybe they aren't smart enough to improve themselves."

" Oh , that's so prejudiced, Mary . Why wouldn,t they want to improve themselves ? And what makes You say they aren't smart ? What you should think about is what would Jesus do if he was the ruler. Would he live in a palace in pomp and extravagance or humbly with few worldly possessions ? " Shaheedah had hit the right argument.

" I see what you mean," Mary said .

As if by coincidence, to stop the flow of ideas , Mary's father emerged from the tent.

" How is my mother?" Shaheedah asked .

" She will be fine as soon as the baby is born . However, it is imperative she remain in bed till then . She has toxemia and must rest undisturbed . It is very important that her blood pressure is kept low and that means no bad or upsetting news. Otherwise, she could lose the baby and perhaps die herself, " the doctor explained .

" Thank-you, Reverened , for coming to assist my mother, " Shaheedah said without looking at him .

" You are quite welcome . Now what have you two young ladies been talking about ?" He asked.

They looked at each other . Shaheedah crossed both arms behind her back. Mary copied the gesture. Shaheedah then put her right hand over her heart. Mary did the same . Laughter broke out, uncontrollable giggling. The chaplain stared at the two in disbelief.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The days passed easier for Shaheedah now that she had a pact with Mary . But she missed her alot.

one afternoon Shaheedah packed a light lunch and filled up two waterbags. She " borrowed " a young camel and snuck off towards the mission . The time she snuck off to her cousin's wedding was nothing compared to this, she thought. she knew the risks involved. Not only could she get lost or face a blinding sandstorm but it was simply unheard of for a young woman to travel alone in the desert. Her need to talk with Mary was more powerful though than these fears.

When Shaheedah rode up to the mission, Mary saw her. She made the gestures of the behind the - back cross and the hand on the heart and Shaheedah made them back . Then she turned the camel around and rode out a short die to a solitary palm tree. Mary followed on foot.

" I hope nothing's wrong, Shaheedah, " Mary started, almost bursting with joy at seeing her new friend again. " I hope you just came to visit me . I've missed you alot."

" I've missed you too and absolutely nothing's the matter," Shaheedah said .

"I just had to get away to talk to you."

" How's your mother?"

" She feels better now that she knows the problem. The baby will be coming in a few weeks' *insha 'Allah.*"

" I didn't know she was that far along!" Mary exclaimed. " Maybe you'll get a sister this time. If you do what do you think Youy mother will name her?"

" Oh , she hasn't said . But maybe Maryam,," Shaheedah said , with a wink . " Or Isa if it's a boy."

" What does Isa mean?"

" That's the Arabic for Jesus ."

" But you can't name a boy Jesus," Mary was annoyed.

" Why not ? Muslims name boys all the prophets' names Shaheedah said with surprise .

" But Jesus wasn't a prophet . He is the son of God."

" God didn't have any sons or daughters. How could you believe such a thing?" She had heard Christians believed that but had never met anyone who actually did.

" In the Bible it says: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life' " Mary quoted as best as she could under the pressure of the discussion.

" Jesus was an extraordinary man ' that is certain," Shaheedah said. " He was born to the virgin Maryam who was never touched by any man. He is like Adam, the first man, because he was created without a father. But Adam was created without a mother also ,so why not call him the son of God? And Eve was created from the same mud as Adam, but she's not called the daughter of

God."

" But Jesus died on the cross for our sins and if we don't believe in him we will go to hell " Mary said with conviction.

" Why does he have to die for us. man is not born sinful and in need of a saviour to die for us . Also if a person does many bad acts but still believes in Jesus he will go to paradise. That is not just."

Mary thought about this for a minute . Then she said, " so how do you get to paradise?"

" Muslims do not need a bridge like believing that someone took our sins off us and died for us . Each person is responsible for his or her own soul. Whether you go to paradise or Hell depends on believing in Allah as only one God, believing He sent many prophets of which prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace is the last, and by doing good deeds, especially praying and fasting."

" What do you mean God is one ?" Mary asked.

" Christians believe in the trinity or three-in -one . In other words, you believe Allah has partners or helpers - Jesus and the Holy spirit. In fact, you believe God is God and he sent his son at the same time you believe Jesus is God. That is absurd. " Shaheedah was glad she had listened to her teachers when learning about other religions.

" Not only does Allah have no partners, helpers, sons or daughters ," Shaheedah continued, "but he is not a man sitting on a heavenly throne. No one can or will see Allah and he is not like anything we can imagine . He is one in the sense that he is alone and acts alone and created everything by himself. He needs nothing and no one but everything and everyone needs Him.

"Mary was impressed at Shaheedah's words . She

Felt that what she was hearing was the truth. " How can you explain these things so clearly and easily and You're only 15 years old ? Whenever I ask my father something I get more confused."

" I can understand that, "Shaheedah said. " Your religion *is* confusing but Islam is very simple to understand."

" So when did prophet Muhammad come ?"

" Around 600 years after Jesus. "

" How many Muslims are in the world?" Mary asked full of questions .

" Oh , there are about one billion , everywhere from Indonesia to Morocco, from Canada to Australia. There are large numbers in the Soviet Union, China, Europe and North America. In fact , Islam is the second largest religion in the world and the fastest growing, shaheedah said, proud in a way she had never been before. I have seen many Muslims in Africa , especially in Nigeria. We were there trying to convert them to Christianity last year, " Mary said .

" Why would you do such a thing?" Shaheedah was aghast.

" Because they need to know about Jesus," Mary simply said.

" They know about Jesus already. Don't forget Jesus came before prophet Muhammad. upon whom be peace . And they also know what Christians have done around the world," Shaheedah said bluntly.

" What do you mean?" Mary asked.

" Well , it was Christians , for instance, who went from Europe to America and stole the land from the Indians."

" We didn't steal their land . They were willing to share it, Mary said defensively. "And anyway they needed us to help civilize them."

"What an ignorant statement!" Shaheedah exclaimed. "Why would you think they were uncivilized in the first place?"

"They lived in tents and steppes and didn't have big cities and things."

"So what! They had a good, healthy, moral life. They were doing just fine before the white man came and drove them away. Now the Indians are almost extinct. They live on reservations and suffer many problems. Indians have a high alcohol and suicide rate. They are discriminated against and live in poverty. They have lost their culture and pride." Shaheedah realized as she spoke that the things her religious teachers and Father had taught her were the pure truth. Before she had never thought about them too seriously.

She went on, "It is exactly your kind of christian, attitude that ruins many people. Like the blacks who were stolen from Africa."

"But those blacks were savages and cannibals. They also needed our help," Mary said.

"That's utter nonsense. Did you know that the majority of the Africans who were kidnapped and taken to America as slaves were Muslims? They were definitely not savages."

Mary did not know that. "How do you know they were Muslims?"

"The areas on the west coast of Africa where the Africans were caught and sold were Muslim lands. The scholars have documented this," Shaheedah said. "But those blacks were poor and needy."

"Even if they were poor, does being poor mean you should enslave them and force them to work the land from dawn to dusk? And what is your measure of being poor anyway?" Shaheedah

asked, thinking of her own lack of riches .

" I guess you're right," Mary admitted.

" Those christians also view others as inferior based on the color of their skin, but they preach the opposite," Shaheedah continued. "Take, for example, their pictures of Jesus. He is drawn as a white man blond with hair and blue eyes. But it is very doubtful he looked anything like that coming from the area of the world , Palestine, that he did , unless of course he had some European blood mixed in .

" Yes I see what you mean . Many white people are prejudiced against someone. my father always tells me that the Muslims are so stupid, lazy and backward. He says they are dumb to let the west take all their oil at such low prices . He also says the same thing about the blacks and the Indians . But I think you are the most intelligent person I 've ever met ."

Shaheedah was flattered and tried to interrupt Mary.

" Not only that, " Mary continued, "but you are honest."

" You are too kind. Don't say anymore or it might go to my head, " Shaheedah laughed.

" The things you've told me today have really made me think. Thanks, " Mary said sincerely.

Shaheedah thought Mary was a little bit too gullible. She herself had resisted such indoctrination more fiercely. I have to go now, Mary. I don't want to be missed. *Insha'Allah*, we will meet again."

" Yes , *Insha'Allah*. " Mary made the special gestures and Shaheedah repeated them. Then she mounted the camel and rode off towards the west.

CHAPTER EIGHT

As Shaheedah was tying up the camel, Abbas ran up to her .

▪ Shaheedah , you'll never guess who's here! " He said with excitement.

▪ Who ?" She asked.

▪ jafar and Bilal , our neighbors!" He exclaimed .

▪ Is that right? What are they doing here in the desert?"

▪ I don't know. You'll have to ask them, " Abbas said.

Shaheedah walked slowly away to check on her mother. Her baby was due so soon and as expected Faheemah was sleeping peacefully. Jafar and Bilal, Shaheedah thought. They were Mohsin Abdul-Rasheed's sons, the man who had arranged their escape from Kuwait . It would be nice talking with them, She definitely wanted to find out if they'd heard anything about her father as well about the situation in kuwait.

The afternoon turned to evening and Shaheedah had not even been able to get close to the young men . It was difficult in the bedouin lifestyle where men and women were almost always separated. In Kuwait she had always been welcome to sit with the men and listen, although she had not cared to then. In religious gatherings and in her own home,

women could be around men if they dressed and behaved properly. As long as she wore clothes that covered her properly and behaved in a moral and virtuous manner, there was no problem being with men. Of course, in her rich relatives' houses there was no such distinctions. They enjoyed dressing up and sitting in mixed gatherings.

The evening fire was lit and the men gathered around to listen to their visitor's stories. Shaheedah could barely stand it. She inched as close to the men as possible, trying to hide herself under her *chador*. She sat hunched in the darkness, close enough to hear every word. When the visitors entered the circle, Shaheedah gasped. The youngest one, Jafar was so handsome it took her breath away. He was the same man who had taken them into his house to talk with his father, but she had not even looked at him then. He strode elegantly amongst the bedouins, dressed in a jade-colored robe and bone white *kufi* (crocheted cap) on his head. His raven black hair and full beard glistened as it captured the moon's light and the fire's glow. He nodded and touched his heart at each man in a very dignified and brotherly fashion. Shaheedah could only stare with a gaping mouth. She never even saw his brother.

Jafar sat down and was handed a cup of steaming tea. He sipped, sighed and glanced around the circle. All eyes were fixed on him.

A few minutes passed in silence. The chief bedouin, Jamal al-Deen, rose. He dusted the sand off his aquamarine robe, turned towards the brothers and nodded.

"We are greatly honored to have two esteemed guests with us today. These young men have been

successful in the struggle against the un-Islamic forces in the area . We pray to Allah they achieve many more victories. Let us all listen as they share their thoughts with us. "

The bedouins shouted in encouragement when the elder indicated to Jafar to begin. Excitement filled the air and floated to Shaheedah .

" *Al-Hamdulillah* (praise be to Allah) and thanks to Him who has led us to your harbor of security and brotherhood. My brother and I feel very safe and happy with you.

" As you have heard from your transistor radio, the western forces now out-number the Saudi forces four to one . The US's alone makes up three to one of the Saudis . The west wants the world to believe that Saddam of Iraq is a Muslim. He hates Islam and everyone saw how he killed so many Muslims in his lifetime so far. With the west's okay he waged an eight-year-long war against the Islamic republic of Iran. In that war, the US and the Soviet Union joined forces against the Islamic state...."

" yes !" shouted one young man . " And no one called him a Hitler then."

" Allahu Akbar! (Allah is Great)," the bedouins shouted in unison.

" He massacred thousands of Kurdish Muslims by poison gas in his own country . And did the US care?" another man exclaimed.

" No ,no! no one cared!" everyone screamed.

" That,s right, brothers, " Jafar began again. But since the Iraq-Iran war has finished, since the Russians were forced to leave Afghanistan, since the Palestinians and Lebanese are keeping up thier struggle against the State of Israel, since the Muslim in Kashmir are awakening to the brutality of the Indian Hindus, and general since the Muslims all over

are uniting and demanding their rights, the west, and especially the US, is afraid. Their real purpose in being in Saudi is to control the spread of Islam. They are petrified of the power of Islam and we are here to show them that might and let them taste it."

" Yes, brother, that's right," someone said.

" Since time began the forces of right and wrong have been in play," Jafar continued. " Cain killed Abel on and on it goes . All the prophets came to guide mankind towards the truth and the right way. Prophet Noah was ordered by Allah to build an ark miles from water. His ark took a while to complete because it was enormous. the people laughed and ridiculed him . They thought he was stupid and demented - not only because of his ark but because he was calling them to Allah's way. In today's times we saw how the west did the same thing to a religious man Imam Khomeini. He was the butt of jokes and chastised daily.

" Sinners do not want to hear that they are wrong. Corrupted people like doing despicable things. They like dressing lewdly, drinking alcohol, cursing, lying, fornicating and committing adultery. When these people are powerful - owners and presidents of multi - national corporations, rulers and heads of state - the extent of their crimes knows no limit. They will cheat and steal, murder and maim to get what they desire.

" This is what the prophets came to control - to bring man away from the level of the beasts and lift him higher than the angels. And this justice, virtue and truth is what Islam calls for and it is what the west is against. For if Islam were to take over in Kuwait, the Arabian peninsula, Turkey, Iraq,etc, it would spell disaster for the west. No

longer would they get oil so cheap and turn right around and make the money back by selling these countries weapons. For example, during the eighties, Saudi Arabia bought \$30 million worth of arms from the west and Kuwait brought between \$1.5 and \$2 billion. Saudi Arabia's Armed forces only number 70,000 and you see how ineffective Kuwait's was .If Saudi Arabia has so many weapons, why did the US and other western forces have to come into the area? How can the Saudi government claim to be the defenders of the holy cities of Makkah and Medina when they need non-Muslim help? And who is using the arms today that the Saudis bought? In fact, they are paying for the U.S and others to fight for them and letting them use their own weapons to boot."

Jafar paused and his brother handed him a second cup of tea.

"Now brothers, we have come across some very sensitive information that we wish to share with you.As you know, there is a small settlement of Americans near here. Their commanding officer is sergeant kevin o'Brien. The operation is set up to resemble a christian mission but in reality it is a cover for a spy camp. O'Brien acts as preacher and doctor , administering to the US troops, but I want to ask you one question: since that place has been set up, have you, on your various excursions , ever seen any US soldiers holding services at the camp?"

Shaheedah had been listening attentively all this time , but now she was flabergasted . What was Jafar saying? Mary's father a spy? Was it possible? It was true that she had never seen any American soldiers at the camp other than the staff.

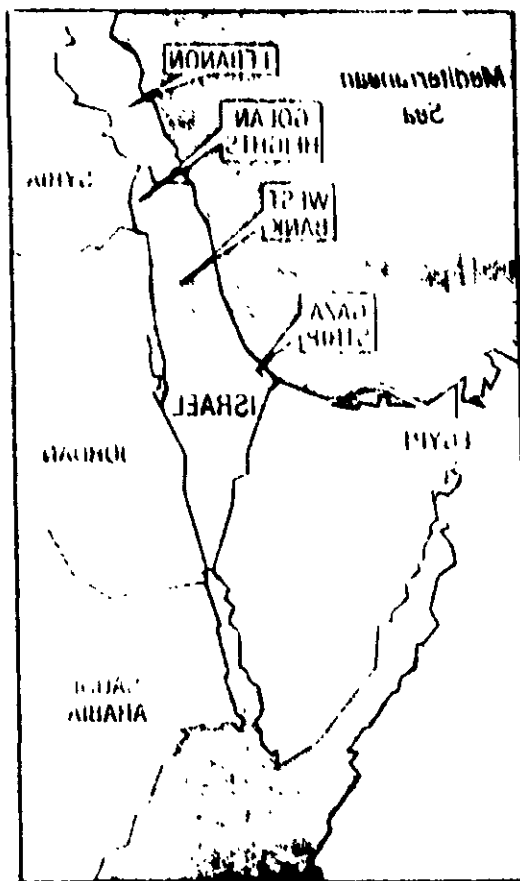
" And tomorrow we will strike, " she heard Jafar

say . Strike what? Strike where? She had missed what Jafar had said while deep in thought.

* Others will join us and we will hit the so-called mission at 10.00 in the morning. What we need from you brothers is a safe haven to return to for a few days while things cool off enough for us to get out of the area."

* That you have, Jafar," Shaikh al-Deen said.

Wow! Shaheedah thought. They are going to do something to Mary's father. She just sat in the sand in disbelief. Could he be wrong? Would they kill the Americans? What should she do?



CHAPTER NINE

Shaheedah crept away from the circle of men. A shadow of gloom fell over her as she prepared for bed. She knew the brothers were correct. They would not strike at the Americans without just cause.

Sleep would not come. Shaheedah tossed and turned in the stifling tent. Had it always been this hot, she wondered. The night sounds loomed boisterous and scary - the hyenas, owls and crickets seemed to shout at her, making her head spin.

What concerned Shaheedah most was, of course, Mary. Should she run and tell her of the attack? After all, she was an innocent victim of her father. They had become close and there was no use in Mary being harmed. Yet, Shaheedah thought, she's not a Muslim and informing her of the attack would be betraying Islam. Surely the Muslim fighters would not hurt Mary. The thoughts reeled and reeled in her head, pounding at her brain.

Then she remembered a story relevant to her predicament. When the prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was preparing to attack Makkah, one Muslim, fearing for the safety of his non-Muslim relatives who lived there, dispatched a secret message to them. In it he relayed the prophet's intentions and warned them to evacuate the city.

Allah revealed this to the prophet and he immediately had the message intercepted by his son-in-law, Ali. Thus, the Muslims' plans were not disclosed and Makkah was conquered in a surprise attack.

Yes, Shaheedah reflected. Telling Mary of the plans would be wrong, but she could do something without letting Mary know them. She decided to leave directly after sunrise. With that turmoil resolved, shaheedah fell into a deep sleep.

she performed her morning prayers and as the sun rose she quietly slipped away. By the time she reached Mary it would be around 8:00 she figured.

As she had hoped, Mary was in her tent having a quick sponge bath. Shaheedah softly called her name Mary came out in her nightgown. She was surprised to see her friend. Their hands flew swiftly making the secret sign.

"Get dressed, Mary. I want to talk to you," Shaheedah said.

"Ok, but first I must eat something or my father will be suspicious," Mary said.

"Be quick about it then. I'll wait for you."

Mary headed towards the mess tent. It seemed ages before she reappeared.

"What took you so long?" Shaheedah asked, as the girls walked away from the settlement. It was important to get Mary as far away as possible.

"My father kept me back talking on and on about Agnes. She'll be arriving this afternoon from Washington, D.C.," Mary explained.

"What was she doing in the US capital?"

"I don't know. All I know is she had a very important meeting with the president," Mary said casually.

"With the president!" Shaheedah exclaimed. "Why

would a missionary need to talk with the president?" But she already knew the answer.

" Oh Agnes is not a missionary . In fact , she's not even a Christian . She's a Jew - Agnes Brockmann - and she's a corporal in the US army. My father has been working with her for the past ten or so years."

" Doing what?"

" Gosh, I don't know." Mary seemed bored with the conversation.

Shaheedah urged her to continue. But Mary, think about it for a minute. You say your father's a preacher?"

" That's right."

" And he's an army preacher or chaplain or whatever?"

"Yes."

"Plus he's a doctor?"

" Specializing in internal medicine," Mary added.

" He works with a jew in a christian mission near the frontlines of Saudi Arabia during a war. And that Jew has just flown to see the president of the US."

"So my father has consulted with the president lots. In fact, I've met two of them myself," Mary bragged.

All the pieces fit together in a neat jig-saw. Shaheedah stared at Mary. She acted so innocent. Could she not know who her father was , Shaheedah wondered. She looked at her watch. It was 9:15 .

"Let's sit here," Shaheedah suggested. Then trying to use up the time, she said, " Mary, what were the presidents like?"

"Oh , you know, very cordial and business-like. It was exciting to be that close up to great men."

"Yeh, right. They're great men," Shaheedah said sarcastically.

"What?" Mary asked.

"Oh, nothing. Hey, Mary tell me about some of the places you've been in the world."

"Well, let's see. I especially like Japan. That's the only country which has never been conquered, you know. The Japanese believe they are descended from gods which makes them superior to everyone else. But I didn't feel inferior to them."

"In Hong Kong I enjoyed riding around on rick-shas. It was great fun being pulled around the city. Although the people are so small, they have a lot of strength to haul around tourists all day. Maybe they get it from practising the martial arts.

You know that's where all those arts come from - Tae Kwan DO, Kung FU, Karate."

"But didn't you feel that it was oppressive sitting there and letting another human being pull you around?" Shaheedah was annoyed at the idea.

"No, it was romantic," Mary said.

"Well, I think it's disgusting. It reminds me of how kings treat their servants. I would rather walk."

"I also saw many parts of Africa," Mary changed the subject. "Some of the people there are very poor. They have no electricity or running water. It amazes me how they can live like that."

"Did you go to south Africa?"

"Yes, I was there last year."

"So what do you think about their system of apartheid?" Shaheedah asked.

"We never went to the black townships so I don't really know how they live. But the cities are very nice and everyone has a huge house and at least two cars and a servant. Many people have chauffeurs and cooks and nannies. The women

practically have nothing to do but socialize. The are so free and happy."

Shaheedah couldn't believe her ears."You're so stupid, Mary!" she exclaimed.

"Why do you say that?"

"Those South African whites came and took the native blacks' land and put them into shantytowns. They are their virtual slaves. The blacks do all their work and that's why the women are idle." Shaheedah could barely contain her emotions.

"Who teaches you these things?" Now she saw the value of the hours and hours of religious education she had received in Kuwait.

"So someone has to do the work," Mary said . "Besides, it's not like they work for nothing. They do get paid."

"How much do they get? A few dollars a day. And what about time off, holidays, vacations and sick leave? Do they get that?"

"I don't think the system's that sophisticated. But they do have a nice place to live and good food to eat. Not like those that live in the black areas," Mary said.

"How do they live Mary ? You said you didn't know." Shaheedah could feel the heat building up inside her . she was furious."I heard the whites treat the workers so bad that the garbage men have to run behind the garbage truck and throw the trash in as best they can. of course, a white man is driving the truck as fast as he can, laughing all the time at the black men running like dogs behind it ."

Mary's face turned red she looked at her watch this time. standing up, she said, "It's five minutes to ten. I have to go now or I'll get in trouble."

"Please don't leave . Let's talk about something more pleasant, Shaheedah said. I must keep her

here at least until 10:30' she thought.

"My father will be angry if I stay away too long. He worries about me alot."

"Just tell him you were enjoying your walk so much that you forgot the time," Shaheedah urged. "What do you want to talk about?"

"How about I ask you some questions since you're always asking me?" Mary announced.

"Sure .Let me have it."Shaheedah laughed . She was relieved Mary was staying and they were back on good terms.

"First, I want to know why you always have to cover your hair and you never wear shorts or short-sleeved shirts," Mary said outright. "The men don't have to dress like that."

" That's right, they don't ."Shaheedah said, a point that had always irked her. "But asks yourself why the pictures and statues of Mary mother of Jesus, show her in clothes like mine."

"That was the style then," Mary said.

"No, it is because the women were modest and kept their bodies and hair covered so as not to be loose and molested by men . The loose women dressed any old way they pleased - just like today. But the women who dressed like me were respected as God fearing, upright women. Their beauty was hidden from men and only allowed to be seen by other women, their husband, sons and grandfathers. "Shaheedah remembered how her non-practising relatives loved to show off beauty. Once she had wished to be just like them.

"But why doesn,t the men's beauty have to be covered"

"Really, Mary, are men beautiful? Are they molested by women or is it the other way around? And anyway here in Saudi Arabia and some other

countries the men do dress modestly - in long robes or baggy pants."

"I see your point," Mary confessed. "But isn't it dreadfully hot and uncomfortable?" Shaheedah, too used to think so .

" You get used to it . I think wearing mini-skirts or tight jeans or hose is terribly uncomfortable, but you get used to it . Clothing one's body is in fact cooler than exposing the skin to the sun's burning rays, you know."

"You know what just hit me?" Mary stammered. "When it's really hot, construction workers wrap up their heads in a cloth. I guess it's for the same reason."

"SO you can see for yourself. And another thing," Shaheedah said, "it's been said that you can tell how moral a Society is by the amount of clothes the women wear . The less clothes the more immoral."

"Another one, "Mary burst in. "Behind every successful man is a good woman she beamed.

"Yes, because it is the women in the society who keep it running properly. If women are loose and lewd, the society becomes that way. We must guide the men in these matters and our clothes help them to see us as human beings instead of as simply sex objects - dolls and playthings for their pleasure."

"What you're saying is so true, Shaheedah," Mary said. "Everything today is being sold using women's sexuality. A car as has a half-naked woman lying provocatively across the hood. Plus if a woman isn't all made up in beautiful revealing clothes no one looks at her or takes her serious. It's hard to get a boyfriend, job, or even rent an apartment unless you fit a sexy description."

"So you see, my clothes benefit me. They are not a prison but quite the opposite. They protect me from harm and force men to see me for myself. They let everyone know who I am and that I'm proud of myself, not ashamed of my body as some people believe. They let people know I'm a Muslim," Shaheedah concluded.

"But one thing confuses me," Mary said. "Why have some countries like France and Turkey tried to ban the scarf?"

"Well, you must know that Turkey follows the west and really wants to be like them. France and the other western countries are afraid of Islam so they try to deny Muslims their rights. They put obstacles in the Muslims' paths so perhaps they would find it hard to be a Muslim and simply give up."

"But what harm could wearing a scarf cause?" Mary asked.

"Think about it. What do you suppose would happen if all the women in the world, or even a lot of them, started dressing like me?" Shaheedah asked.

"Let's see. The fashion industry would go out of business or be forced to make clothes like yours. Plus the cosmetics industry would suffer."

"Yes and the women would no longer allow themselves to be used in advertising and TV and the movies the way they do, now," Shaheedah added.

"Gosh, it would be a catastrophe for the businesses," Mary said. "You Muslim women hold a lot of power in your hands that you don't even realize."

"Yes, I guess we do," Shaheedah said, realizing it herself for the first time.

"Oh, Shaheedah," Mary shouted, jumping up. "Look at the time. I must go." Shaheedah glanced at her watch. It was 10:25. Was it safe for Mary

to return, she wondered.

"Ok , but let's walk back slowly " Shaheedah said reluctantly. "It may be awhile before we see each other again."

The girls began strolling towards the mission. As they neared it , Shaheedah paused. In the distance she saw black billowing smoke. Yes, it was from the mission,she realized.

"I will turn back now, "Shaheedah told Mary, relieved she had not noticed the smoke . Shaheedah made the secret gestures and jumped on the camel . "See you," She waved, riding off.

A few yards away, she turned back to see Mary running towards the camp. Mary screamed out but Shaheedah could not go to her . Her loyalty to her religion now outweighed their relationship.



CHAPTER TEN

The camel sensed Shaheedah's urgency and trotted back at top speed .Her thoughts flashed to Mary and then to her neighbor, Jafar. Approaching the bedouin camp, she heard shouts of excitement. All the men were running around in a frenzy; even the women were out. A circle of bedouins surrounded Jafar and Bilal. They lifted them above their heads and carried the brothers around and around . All the men danced with drawn swords, jumping and shouting . It was quite a spectacle.

Shaheedah tied the camel and intermingled with the women who were hugging each other. Very young girls were dancing, spreading out their veils and spinning around in circles. The twirling drew out the multi- colored veils in a show of beauty,like peacocks in a mating dance.

It was apparent to Shaheedah the Muslims had been successful in their raid on Mary's Father's camp. The welcome they received from the bedouins proved their enthusiasm for the attack. She was relieved Mary had missed it, however, her scream worried Shaheedah. What had Mary seen, she wondered.

The festivities carried on for at least an hour. The women withdrew early to prepare a hearty meal. Shaheedah went to visit her mother.

"How are you feeling today, Mother?" She asked.

"I feel marvelous. It seems I have a burst of energy and should be up assisting the women. The baby will come soon, *insha'Allah*," she said.

"I am glad you are so well today but you must stay in bed," Shaheedah said.

"Yes, I know," her mother answered. "However, I feel an urge to sweep the floor and prepare for the baby."

"Let me do it for you," Shaheedah said, grabbing the broom.

"Shaheedah, what was all that shouting outside just now? Did someone get married?"

"No. Jafar and Bilal and some others raided that mission near here," she said. "But I don't know exactly what happened."

"I see. Perhaps we will hear about it later. It gives me great pleasure to be neighbors of those heroic young men. Since your father ... " Faheemah paused. "Since your father has been gone, I prayed for just such an attack."

"Tonight, Mother," Shaheedah said. "I will try to find out what the Muslim forces did."

"How will you do that?"

"I will listen to the men as they speak around the fire," she said.

"That's great," her mother laughed. "But don't let them see you or you will surely be embarrassed."

The afternoon quickly passed into evening. Everyone was abuzz with excitement over the operation that morning, but Shaheedah could not extract any information from all the talk. As the men gathered around the nightly fire, Shaheedah crept close. In the glow, she spied Jafar. He has so much charisma, she thought. And how courageous and intelligent he is.

"Victory comes from Allah," Jafar began. The circle

grew silent. "I know everyone is itching to hear about our operation on the spy camp. Let me caution you first that our identities must be kept secret. This is of utmost importance - a factor of life and death. I'm sure you all understand. "

The men nodded.

"At exactly 10:00 we attacked, quite by surprise. We had completely surrounded the camp so it was very easy and quick . In all we were 15 . The soldiers did not even have time to draw their weapons. All of them were tied up and placed in the middle of the settlement. The sergeant was hiding in the corner of the mess tent behind barrels of oil.

"He tried to claim he was a man of god and off limits according to international law. He was very scared and just sat terrified while we ransacked his tent. And , oh, what we discovered."

The tension among the bedouins increased. They were eager to hear the information.

"All I can disclose is that we were correct. The mission is a cover for a spy camp. The Americans' diabolical plans are to gather information on the revolutionary groups operating in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf States. This they relay directly to Washington via the famous spy Agnes Brockmann."

The bedouins shrieked. The "mann" at the end of the name proved her to be a Jew.

"Yes, a Jew in the area spying on the Muslims. Their objective is to create a new world order with US bases in all the Muslim countries. In order to infiltrate the area, they plan to export western culture to the masses through their stooges who have been placed and financed by the west. These lackeys are known to everyone the leaders of all the Muslim countreis except Iran. They bow to US

imperialism and rush to obey the orders of the west. The *ulama* (clergy) are employed by them to control the mosques to mislead the masses. These *u l a m a* teach American Islam, a passive, turn-the-other-cheek religion, based solely on rituals. To separate the mosque from the state is their ultimate goal.

"The US wishes to saturate the Muslim lands with western values. They will, and already have in many cities, export their ideas and filth. You can see today this has been relatively successful. In the major Muslim cities it screams out at you. our youth are discarding Islam and turning to the west. pop music, drugs, alcohol, fashion, movie stars and the like take up their minds and bodies. Our women are abandoning their roles and turning themselves into playthings. It is not uncommon to see the majority unveiled, wearing skimpy clothes make - up and styled hairstyles. These women look with pity at our revolutionary women who follow the prophet's instructions to cover their bodies."

Shaheedah listened carefully to Jafar. She knew all these things were true. Suddenly she realized that without Islam the world was doomed to be a prison of corruption. The only way to salvation was obeying Allah. She Silently prayed, asking Allah to help her to be a good Muslim.

"When the women and the youth go astray," Jafar continued, "the society will soon disintegrate. Casinos, pornography shops and western Films and TV shows follow. The women will demand to be treated like men as the feminist movement proclaims, instead of as the beautiful flowers they are . This will result in fornication, adultery and even abortions . Unwed mothers will be common. It will not be unheard of for a woman to have relations with

tens of men in her lifetime. The youth will leave the mosque and demand that everyone is equal - homosexuals, convicts, gang members. They will drop out of school and resort to spending hours of time and energy on punk hairstyles, music and drugs as well as vying with each other in who can be baddest. And, of course, these activities will not bother the men who revel in lewdness and make money off these products. It is the men who wish to see naked women and it is the men who make and sell such commodities as drugs, fashion and entertainment.

"Islam came to rid the world of these evils and dirt. If we allow the west to remain in our lands, they will spread sin and corruption. It is only through worshipping Allah, fearing the horrors of the grave and desiring paradise that we will be successful. Anything else leads to Hell.

"If we care for the prophet, if we want to protect our fellow men, women and children, and if we want to meet the righteous in the Hereafter, we must act now. Non-action is the worst course. We must oust the west from our lands. Everywhere - here, palestine, Africa - all over the world where Muslims are in the majority. As Ayatullah Khomeini said: 'our war is that of ideology and does not recognize borders or geography.'"

"Yes, yes, brother!" the bedouins shouted. "We are with you!"

"When we confronted the sergeant about these things, he denied them, of course, Jafar went on. "He adamantly claimed he was only a preacher, sent to administer to the troops. Even when we flashed the documents in his embarrassed face, he denied it. Sweat poured out of his brow. He was petrified we would eliminate him. That was all he could think

about. But we had no intention of harming these Americans at least not now.

"These documents will soon be handed over to our leaders who will decide the next course of action. If the Americans were smart they would pack up and leave now like they did in Lebanon a few years back. We will never allow them to set up bases here like they have everywhere else in the world. We do not need them and they must go."

"Jafar, Bilal interrupted. "Tell them about the Girl."

Shaheedah's heart sank. What had happened to Mary, She worried.

"Oh, yes," he started. "In our search, we came across a particularly interesting piece of information. It seems that the young girl, Mary O'Brien, is not what she seems at all."

Not a spy, too Shaheedah thought, and I told her about my Father's arrest.

"She is not the daughter of the sergeant," Jafar said. "Her name is Zahida Abdul-Noor and she was born to Muslim parents in Lebanon."

What ! Shaheedah could not believe her ears. Mary - Zahida - a Muslim!

"This Zahida was adopted as an infant by the Americans and has grown up not knowing her heritage," Jafar went on.

"How utterly obscene!" One old bedouin exclaimed.

"Yes, how could a non - Muslim adopt a Muslim child?" another shouted, wiping away lone tear.

Shaheedah could not contain herself. She felt a rasping in her throat and tried desperately to get rid of it. The more she suppressed the tickle, the worse it became, until suddenly she coughed.

The men turned round and Jafar jumped, his hand on his revolver. "Who's there?" he shouted.

Shaheedah bolted to her feet and tore off towards her tent. Several bedouins took chase as she ran, her veil flying in the wind, they realized it

was the young Kuwaiti girl.

"it's nothing, " one said returning to the circle.

Nothing? Jafar thought, his eyes still fixated on the fleeing girl. Nothing but the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Shaheedah fought to catch her breath as she sat in the corner of her tent. How dumb, she thought. The men will imagine I am such a child, spying on them and running away. I'm always running away from something or the other. She was very embarrassed and knew she would be the talk of the town come morning.

Her mother groaned in her sleep. Shaheedah went to her side but Faheemah did not awaken. As she settled into bed, her mother groaned again, perhaps she was having a bad dream, Shaheedah thought. The next time Faheemah called out for Shaheedah.

"The baby is coming," Faheemah said. "Go and get Batul."

Shaheedah threw her *chador* around her and rushed out into the crisp night. As she hurried to awaken Batul she noticed Jafar walking towards the shaikh's tent.

She hid until he was inside. He must have some more exciting news to tell the shaikh, she assumed. She would have been in shock had she been privy to Jafar's conversation with the shaikh.

Batul and Shaheedah hurried back to Faheemah. The pains were coming harder and sharper, about every three minutes. Faheemah was sweating, grabbing and twisting a piece of rope. The midwife silently examined Faheemah and said, "The baby will be here soon, *insha'Allah*. Bring some water

and sugar for your mother."

Shaheedah was very excited about witnessing the birth of her sibling. This would be her first experience around a birthing mother since in Kuwait most women had their babies in the hospital.

Batul was busy setting up her equipment - sterile string to tie the cord soft blankets, a few squares of material, a large bowl for the placenta and a bucket of boiled water. She handed Shaheedah a Qur'an full of markers and a small hand-written book of prayers.

"Read the verses which are marked in the Qur'an," the old woman instructed.

"Read them softly and clearly." Shaheedah felt an eerie sense of *deja vu*.

she turned to the first marker and saw the verse. Her voice rung out in the night . Batul stoked the fire . She ground some leaves together in her special mortar. The aroma filtered to Shaheedah . "This tea will make the birth easier, *insha'Allah*." Batul explained to the air.

As Shaheedah recited the verses, her mother bore the pains easier. She, too, was reciting, as if she had memorized them for this time . When the tea was prepared, Shaheedah helped her mother sip some and Batul took over the reading.

The tea relaxed Faheemah and she lay back to rest. Batul, too stretched out on a straw mat to catch a few winks. The labour could last well into the morning hours and she must not be exhausted . But Shaheedah did not dare sleep. She couldn't. The excitement of the birth was overwhelming . Not once had she thought of the revelations about Mary.

She watched her mother dozing. All of a sudden , Faheemah sat upright. "Help me !" she shouted.

Batul rushed to her side , She felt her abdomen

as the contraction subsided. Faheemah slipped back against the cushions. Shaheedah stood near her mother's head and wiped the perspiration from her brow.

"Read from the book of prayers, Shaheedah," Batul said.

Shaheedah began to read. Faheemah shouted out again and Batul felt her contraction.

"Ninety seconds apart. Ninety seconds long," Batul said to herself, nodding her gray head. "*Al-Hamdulillah* (praise be to Allah), Faheemah, it will be soon." she squeezed her hand. "continue reading, Shaheedah."

As Shaheedah read, her mother continued having strong and very painful contractions periodically, Batul wiped her mother's forehead and called on Allah for help. Faheemah was having difficulty controlling the pain now. "

Stay on top of it, Faheemah," Batul knowingly said. "We are here with you. concentrate on Allah and ride with the contraction."

"But it hurts!" Faheemah said loudly. "When will it end?"

"Each contraction is bringing your beautiful baby closer to you," Batul said softly. "Have patience and hope in Allah."

Shaheedah listened carefully to Batul's wise words, She felt honored to be in the presence of such a miracle.

"Oh Allah!" Faheemah screamed. "It's coming, it's coming!"

Batul gently laid Faheemah back against the cushions, She quickly gathered her materials and placed the orderly on the foot of the bed.

"Stand beside me and do as I say," Batul said calmly, wiping her own brow now.

"Help me !" "Faheemah screamed out, sitting bold upright." I want to push."

"Yes it is time ,"Batul said . She placed her hands under the sheet over Faheemah. Yes, Faheemah had remembered to remove her underwear as Batul has previously instructed. All at once warm water gushed out, soaking the sheet, bed and the bottom of Faheemah's and Batul's dresses.

"The waters have broken . Your baby is coming with it ," Batul explained . "With the next contraction , push, Faheemah. Push."

As they waited for that contraction, Batul examined the water . It was clear, not mixed with the tarry black meconium which could have proved dangerous to the baby. she watched Faheemah For the signs of the next contraction. when It began faheemah sat up and beared down as if she was going to the bathroom - the sensation was the same . She pushed and pushed , But the baby would not come.

Faheemah fell back again.

"Good , Faheemah ," Batul said . "You are doing fine With the next one your baby will be here *insha'Allah.* "

The contraction began and Faheemah pushed, She pushed hard, grabbing a breath and pushing again. The baby moved out the birth canal and entered the world . Batul took up the baby and wrapped it gently in a few blankets. Shaheedah watched in astonishment as she handed the new born to her Mother , Faheemah cuddled the infant and softly cried in thanks to Allah .No one spoke.

She handed the baby back to Batul, who turned and gave the infant to Shaheedah .It was so tiny, Shaheedah was scared to hold it . Batul motioned

for her to come outside the tent. Shaheedah looked at her mother. Faheemah nodded her okay, her face glowing.

Batul parted the tent flaps and they stepped out. As she looked at the horizon, Shaheedah saw it would be time for prayers soon. She had not realized they had passed the whole night with the birth.

A man emerged from the edge of the darkness. Shaheedah jerked in surprise and held tight to the baby. It was Jafar. He held out his arms for the baby. Why did he want the newborn? He continued standing there, his arms outstretched, as if she knew why her elbow in an effort for her to turn over the child. She trusted Jafar, Yet she dared not take a chance. In fact, she felt like running away with the child.

Shaheedah took a swift look at his face. It was full of love and devotion. Compelled by some unknown force, she handed over her newborn sibling.

Jafar squatted on the ground and put his mouth close to the baby's right ear. He whispered some words to the baby and Shaheedah understood. He was calling the adhan (the call to prayer) in the baby's ear. Jafar turned to the left ear and whispered the iqamah (the ready for prayer call). Those were the first words the baby heard. Peace enveloped the small group.

"Congratulations," Jafar said as he gently handed the newborn back to Shaheedah. "May Allah bless her and make her grow up to be a fine Muslim Woman."

Shaheedah wondered how he knew the baby was a girl when she did not even know that herself. She was motionless as she watched him stroll away.

CHAPTER TWELVE

After prayers, Shaheedah lay down to sleep. Off and on, she heard her sister, Hasina, cry. She was aware of her mother nursing the baby, but she was in a dream, remembering the birth of her sister. A handsome man came and went in her dream and each time he brought gifts. He made her feel happy and protected, but she could not recognize him. It was Jafar.

Shaheedah felt a hand gently shaking her. She awoke to see her brother, Abbas.

"Get dressed and come outside, Shaheedah," he said. "The shaikh has something to tell you." She could not imagine what it could be.

Careful not to wake her mother and sister, Shaheedah scurried around and emerged from the tent. The Shaikh sat a few yards away.

"*As-Salaamu Alaikum,*" she said to him. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. You are Shaheedah, daughter of Ahmad, no?" he asked

"Yes."

"And you are how old?"

"Fifteen," she said.

"Ah." The shaikh stroked his beard. "since your father is away, I have been approached by Jafar,

son of Mohsin Abdul-Rasheed, for your hand in marriage."

Shaheedah was caught off guard. Her face flushed scarlet.

"Since your mother has just given birth," he continued, "I do not wish to concern her with this matter now. What is your wish?"

"I, don't know," she stuttered.

"Well, it is your decision. I advise you to meet with Jafar, talk and come to a decision. These things should be taken care of quickly," the shaikh said taking on the role of her father

"Yes ." Shaheedah heard herself say. She rung her hands behind her back and hung her head shyly.

"After lunch, meet him at the circle," he said."There you will talk." He rose, bowed towards her and walked away.

Shaheedah retreated in a daze to the safety of her tent, but she could not talk to her mother. There was no one to share this exciting news with no one except Mary. Or should she call her Zahida?

She sat down on the bed and her thoughts turned to Mary. The news about her was as exciting as her marriage proposal, she thought. Mary was born a Muslim and did not even know it. Thinking about herself annoyed Shaheedah. It became imperative that She sees Mary as soon as possible to reveal the news. But that would have to wait until after her talk with Jafar.

Shaheedah busied herself with her mother the baby. She helped prepare food and clean up around the tent. Time flew while Shaheedah tried to keep her mind off her rendezvous. When lunch was brought she could not eat. Her stomach churned and she ran from the tent, fearful she might vomit and expose the whole episode to her mother. She

field to the edge of the camp and collapsed in the sand. Why was her meeting with Jafar affecting her so?

After several minutes, Shaheedah pulled herself together. It made no sense to behave like a scared child. She only wished to talk, she consoled herself. She hastened back to clean herself up but as she came out of the tent to meet him a sense of panic took over again. She was creeping towards the circle. Yet she could not feel her feet moving. Something outside her body was pushing and pulling her.

Jafar was seated, his back to her, bent, quietly reading the Qur'an. He did not see her approach and she stood behind him, watching, for a few minutes. She wanted to turn back, but his reading enchanted her, glueing her to the spot. Jafar stood and faced her, his eyes downcast. Had he known all along she was there? He put out his hand, motioning for her to sit on the small carpet.

"*As-Salaamu Alaikum*," he said.

"*Wa Alaikum Salaam*," she replied.

"I am glad you decided to meet me," Jafar said, sitting down first.

Shaheedah could not look at him. She sat a few feet away.

"The shaikh said it would be proper for us to talk together," he said.

"Yes, he told me."

"How is your mother and the new baby?"

"They are fine and resting," she said. "I was glad you were there to call the prayer in her ears."

"Usually the father does it." His voice drifted off. "You must miss him terribly."

"It is very lonely without him," she said. "Have you heard anything at all about him?"

"Only that he was taken to prison,"Jafar said. "I'm sorry."

"*Insha'Allah*, we will be reunited soon,"she said bravely.

"yes . There are some efforts by the revolutionaries to break into the prison and free the political prisoners . You have been very courageous coming here and living with these bedouins in a strange country without your father, "he said .

"I have adjusted but I do miss my home and Freind. There are no girls my age here to share things with except ... "Shaheedah stopped. She was not sure if she should tell him about Mary. "Except who? Your mother ?"

"No, not her."

"Who then?"

"Well,I've gotten to know the American girl,Mary at the mission,quite well."Jafar was surprised. "Mary? you mean the one whose camp we attacked yesterday?"

"Yes.I understand she was born a Muslim," Shaheedah said.

"That's right. You heard that when you were spying on us last night, didn't you? jafar laughed.

Shaheedah blushed. "You must think I'm such a fool,snooping and then darting away like that."

"No,I think you are inquisitive and adventurous and I like that. I am that way also. "Jafar paused. "That is what attracted me to you .Women who only cook and clean hold no interst for me . I have been looking for a wife who is committed to Islam and wants to struggle for the truth."

"I think women have a great role to play in the world, "she began. "I want to do something to spread and protect Islam." It was surprising she was saying this outloud as she had only recently come to such a conclusion. "But it is very hard because

of the restrictions placed on women in these un-Islamic countries not to mention the persecution Muslims are receiving from the governments."

"Yes, either they teach women only to be men's slaves," Jafar said "or men's toys. But I see you are neither. You would be a fine compliment to the man who marries you."

All this time Jafar had not once looked at Shaheedah's face , but now he dared, to see her reaction. She was staring at the ground, unaware of his glance.

"I want to be that man, Shaheedah," he said softly.

"I don't know if I'm ready for marriage," She said

"Sure you are ," he said .

"But you are much older than me. I'm only 15."

"15,20, what difference does it make?" Jafar exclaimed. "How old do you think I am anyway?"

"Around 25."

"I'm just 22. So there's only a seven years age difference.The prophet advised the woman to marry young, you know."

"But there's so much I want to do before I get married,"Shaheedah said.

"Like what?"

"Like finish school and learn a trade of some kind...Travel,"she added as an afterthought.

"You could do those things while you're married . In fact it would be easier to do when you're married and more fun. Being married gives you a great sense of freedom and love. you are not as restricted as when you're only a daughter because you belong to Someone who loves and trusts You as a woman."

Shaheedah didnot know What to say. she had never intended to marry so young. Yet it was so tempting and she already knew she had the shaikh's

blessings.

"Will you marry me then?" Jafar said.

"Please Jafar," she called his name for the first time. "Please let me think about it For awhile."

"There's not much time you know. Bilal and I are due to leave here the day after tomorrow, *insha'Allah*."

"Tomorrow then, *insha'Allah*, I'll give you my answer, Shaheedah said without hesitation.

"Same time ? Same place?"

"Yes." Shaheedah stood to go. A sharp shrill whistle sounded "Run quickly to your tent," Jafar ordered.

Shaheedah dashed off. She watched through a peek-hole in the tent as Jafar and Bilal rode off into desert. Several bedouins swept over their outgoing tracks with date palm branches and then backtracked to cover their own footprints. soon the brothers had disappeared into the sandhills.

Moments later ten American soldiers drove into the camp. They jumped out of their jeeps waving their guns and shouting for everyone to come outside. The bedouin men encircled the soldiers, but the women remained in their tents.

"What do you want?" Shaikh al-Deen asked.

"Shut-up!" The soldier with the most decorations yelled. "We are looking for several terrorists who attacked and held hostage Reverend O'Brien and his men yesterday. We will search this area. Spread out men." The other soldiers began to fan out.

"You will not come in here and do any such thing," one bedouin said. The commanding officer turned and kicked him in the knees. He fell to the ground in pain. Several bedouins, brandishing knives and swords gathered around the officer.

"It,s best you drop your weapons," he said nodding

at another soldier.

The soldier shot into the air. The bedouins saw that all guns were pointed at them. they looked at their friend lying on the ground.

"It's alright, " the wounded man said.

As the bedouins fell back, shaikh al-Deen stepped forward. I will go with the soldiers to search the tents of the women. You must instruct your men not to touch any of them."

A soldier approached the shaikh. When the helmet was removed, it was apparent the soldier was a woman. The bedouins were startled. She had certainly fooled them with her thick taunt muscles and large hands.

"May I touch the women?" she asked sarcastically. The other soldiers snickered.

Shaikh al Deen came closer to her . He had heard of lesbians in the west. Perhaps she was one he thought peering at her more intently.

" certainly not miss, " he said sternly. "no one should touch the women."

"Ha!" the female soldier laughed. 'I will do what I want with whomever I want. We are American soldiers. Isn't that right, George"? she slept a nearby soldier hard on his back.

"That's right ," George said. No one tells us what to do especially not a desert mouse."

All the soldiers laughed and smacked each other. They were trynig their best to humiliate the Muslims.

"Get out of here! " A young bedouin, barely 20, screamed .He lunged at the nearest soldier. The soldier grabbed him and pulled his arms behind his back. The grip was so tight it almost broke them. The female soldier spat on the ground at his feet.

"What did you say ?" She asked.

He did not answer.

"Speak, you!" She said louder jabbing him in the chest with her finger. The bedouin spat at her feet this time. Her right knee hit him with a thud in the groin. At the same instance the other soldier released him and he crumbled in excruciating pain. With all the soldiers' weapons drawn the bedouins were helpless.

"Spread out men," their commanding officer said. The soldiers began searching, ransacking the tents rummaging around the women while the bedouins could only watch.

As the soldiers neared Shaheedah's tent she became angrier and angrier. How dare they treat us like this she fumed. Two soldiers entered her tent and met Shaheedah standing in the center. She stared at the soldiers in defiance her arms crossed. One soldier turned towards the baby.

"Oh look a newborn," he said. "Isn't she cute? Why is it they have to grow up to be such ugly creatures like this moron?" He pointed at Shaheedah.

"Get out!" Shaheedah shouted. "You dirty Americans!"

The soldier grabbed Shaheedah by the arm and tossed her on the ground like a rag-doll. Faheemah jumped up and pounded on his back. His buddy grabbed her and threw her back on the bed. She tried desperately to kick him in the face. He stood hands on his hips laughing.

Shaheedah took hold of a clay pitcher and threw it at the soldier who had assaulted her. It hit him square on the head but he didn't even move. He looked at Shaheedah like he wanted to crush her like a cockroach under his heel. His look pierced her heart.

"I'll be back for you," he grumbled. He grabbed his comrade, took one last look around the tent and left.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

With Jafar gone, Shaheedah felt very lonely. What if the American soldier returned in the night? Who would protect her, she fretted.

Asleep at last, Shaheedah kept hearing her name. "Shaheedah, Shaheedah." The persistent voice disturbed her - louder , louder until she woke up. But the voice still called out.

"Shaheedah." It was Jafar outside the tent, his voice scarcely a whisper. Shaheedah went outside and Jafar stood up when he saw her. "We must talk," he said.

"It's so nice to see you safe," she said.

"Yes, I'm glad you're okay also," he said. "Let's walk for awhile." Shaheedah realized that the shaikh was walking just behind them as a chaperone.

All the lights in the camp were extinguished but Shaheedah was not afraid in the dark night with Jafar near her. As they walked, she could see the moon in its fullest. It reminded her of the night she heard her father was leaving. The same way the moon's rays had fallen across her room that night they now cast their glow on the tents around her.

"Tell me what the soldiers did when they were

here," Jafar said.

"It was terrible. The Americans were so obnoxious. They threatened us and even attacked some of us. One woman soldier kicked a man in the..." Shaheedah paused, her face flushing with embarrassment.

"How dare she? Their women surely are like men!" he exclaimed. "But you, what happened to you?"

"Two soldiers came into our tent and insulted my mother and me," she said. "They pushed us down and threatened us. One said he would be back to get me."

"What !? Let him try," Jafar said. "No non-Muslim can get away with touching a Muslim woman."

"Jafar," she spoke his name softly. "Will you leave as soon as you said before?"

"I'm not sure. Bilal and I are still discussing that. Since the soldiers checked here already perhaps they will not come again. Maybe we would be safer here than trying to travel out into the desert to our next destination."

"I wish you would stay," she said. "I feel better when you're around."

"And what about my proposal?" Jafar asked. "Do you have the answer?"

"Tomorrow, *insha'Allah* ." Shaheedah turned to face him. "Tomorrow," she repeated.

She heard a rustling in the distance, like mice scratching. Jafar seemed unaware of it.

"I must go in now," she said.

"Yes, tomorrow, then, *insah'Allah*," Jafar said.

Shaheedah hurried back to her tent. She had not realized they had walked so far away from it. A hand suddenly flew across her mouth, stifling the scream she tried to make. Her arms were pinned behind her back. As she struggled to free herself,

she saw her mother tied up in the corner, her mouth gagged. Shaheedah tried in vain to bite the hand over her mouth and kick at his legs. Her Own legs were knocked out from under her and she and her assaulter fell onto the sandy floor.

The attacker, in an effort to get upright, released his hand momentarily from her mouth and Shaheedah tried to scream. But a cloth was quickly stuffed into it and a gag was tied tight.

Still she had not seen her enemy although she had a good idea of his identity. She was pulled forcibly to a sitting position. Her arms were tied behind her back, the rope so tight it cut into her wrists. With her mouth gagged and her arms useless, the attacker ventured to expose himself. He moved around to face her. It was the same American soldier who had threatened her earlier. She was furious. Again she glanced at her mother but Faheemah was defenceless.

The soldier grabbed Shaheedah's feet to tie them. She violently kicked at him. One foot smashed into his face, sending him sprawling backwards.

He jumped up and smacked Shaheedah hard on her right cheek. She took the blow, glaring at him as if to say, "Do it again, you lousy no-good coward, because when I'm free you'll never punch a woman again."

The soldier sat a few feet in front of her , cross-legged on the floor, looking at her, no expression on his clean-shaven face. He couldn't be older than 18, she calculated. Although it was not that hot , his shirt was soaked through with his own sweat, and she realized that was the sour smell permeating the tent.

Hasina began squalling and the soldier turned abruptly towards the baby. Faheemah tried to get

up. She motioned with her head towards the child.

"I want you to silence her," the soldier ordered Faheemah. He walked over and cut the ropes holding her arms and legs. She slid down the gag and went to pick up the baby, cuddling her to her breast. But Hasina continued crying.

"Silence her!" he demanded, agitated at the intrusion into his obscene fantasy.

"She is wet. I must change her," Faheemah lied.

"Do it! Do it!" He stammered, without taking his eyes off Shaheedah's body.

Faheemah walked slowly towards the basket of clothes. The soldier turned to watch her. She turned her back and reached into a small box stuffed at the bottom of the basket. Faheemah pulled out the pistol Yunus had tossed her so long ago.

Quickly she spun around and pointed it at the American. "Get out!" she shouted at the top of her lungs.

"You couldn't pull the trigger," he said defiantly, rising to his feet.

"Get out or I'll kill you!" Faheemah shouted again.

"Shut-up, woman!" he shouted back. His hand went to his own gun.

Faheemah shot at his feet, sprawling sand over his boots.

The tent flaps swung open and Jafar and several other men rushed in. Jafar took hold of the soldier and disarmed him. Faheemah still had her gun pointed at him.

"Let me go!" the soldier screamed in fear.

Jafar dragged him outside. The bedouins shouted at the soldier. They wanted to kill him. He was shaking all over. Jafar threw him down on the ground and pointed his gun at his head.

"Don't kill me, please," he sobbed.

"kill him! Kill him!" the bedouins shouted.

Jafar fired , missing his head by an inch. Sand covered the soldier's face. He spit some out and struggled to get on his feet. Jafar pushed him down again and shot at the other side of his head. Most of the men and even some women, including Shaheedah and her mother , had gathered at the scene now. The soldier was terrified, pleading with Jafar to release him.

"Where is your courage now, boy?" Jafar asked.

"I was wrong. I was wrong," he repeated. "I'm sorry. please, let me go. " He was crying uncontrollably.

"Get up!" Jafar demanded. "Get up and go home. Go back to America. Learn from our copmpassion."

The soldier darted away at top speed, never looking back.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Shaheedah and her mother slept soundly that night, secure in knowing that Jafar was around to protect them. He and Bilal decided it would be safer to remain with the bedouins for the time being, however, they donned the clothing of their hosts as a further disguise.

Three days after the encounter with the American soldier, Shaheedah decided it was safe enough to go and see Mary. The secret she held was burning a hole in her heart and she could not contain it any longer.

She decided it was better to tell no one, not even Jafar, with whom she had become quite close after giving him a yes answer. They had set the date for the forty-first day after the birth of Shaheedah's sister. Usually Muslim mothers recuperate for forty days after giving birth. Jafar approached Faheemah after Shaheedah said yes and she had readily agreed to the marriage of her oldest child. Shaheedah had been afraid of asking her mother so soon after the birth, but Jafar assured her she was strong and had displayed that when she pulled the pistol on the soldier and she was no longer sick.

With all these thoughts darting about in her mind, Shaheedah set off to find Mary. It seemed like a long time since she had last seen her - running towards her camp after the Muslims' attack. She

had so much news to tell.

Shaheedah did not see Mary when she came near the camp. The main tent had been burned completely down its remains left as some kind of reminder of the intrusion. Shaheedah wandered back and forth on the outskirts of the camp, searching for some sign of her friend. She could not return back without seeing her. Mary's father crossed the camp, strolling with his hands clasped behind his back. Shaheedah tried to hide but there was nothing to hide behind.

"Hey!" the sergeant called out.

Shaheedah froze. He walked towards her. Should she run?

"Aren't you Mary's friend?" he asked.

"Yes," Shaheedah answered, frightened at what she knew about this man.

"Well, come with me. She'll be so glad to see you. " He seemed changed somehow, not as arrogant and hard as before.

Shaheedah followed at a safe distance, ready to run away if she felt a trick was at play. As they neared the tent, Mary's father called out for her. She came out her face was paler than usual and she looked like she had lost ten pounds. But her face lit up when she saw shaheedah.

"Take your friend in and have some tea, " they heard her father say. He turned to leave and quickly they made the secret signals. Then the girls hugged each other. Mary led Shaheedah into her tent.

"I'm so glad to see you," Mary began.

"Me, too," Shaheedah replied. "Have you been sick?"

"Yes. When I came back to the camp the last time we were together all the soldiers were tied up, including my father. Some bad guys came and

burned up his tent and stole a bunch of our stuff. I got sick because I was worried they'd return."

"I doubt they will, " Shaheedah said . "They probably got what they were looking for."

"But our staff went looking for them and they could n't find them. Many soldiers from the main base came to search but they've had no luck either. I'm afraid for my father, mostly."

"*Inshah'Allah*, every thing will be fine," Shaheedah said confidently.

"Yes, soon we'll be leaving. My father is taking an early retirement," Mary said. "We'll settle down in Washington, D.C., or one of its suburbs."

"When are you going?"

"In a few months. I wish it was sooner, "Mary said.

"I'm glad for you. That's good news, Mary."

They were both silent for a few minutes, thinking/ of a future without each other.

"I have good news, too" Shaheedah began again.

"Yeh! Tell me, tell me" Mary said anxiously.

"I'm getting married," Shaheedah said dreamily.

"Married!" Mary exclaimed. "When? To whom? Why?"

"In about five weeks. To a neighbour of mine . And because I love him." Shaheedah laughed at her own words. "He's the most handsome, courageous and intelligent man I've ever met."

"And how many men have you met?"

"Oh, lots. In Kuwait many boys had wanted to marry me . Usually their mothers introduced them to mine and I'd meet them. But none compares remotely to my fiance."

"But you 're not even 16 yet!"

"So, I'm ready to get married. And I want you to come to my wedding. Say yes," Shaheedah pleaded.

" That would be fun. But, of course, I'll have to

ask my father."

"Do you think there's a chance he'll let you? You could sneak away, you know."

"For something like this I'm sure he'll let me . If not I'll pout and cry until he gives in . He's really a push-over when it comes to things I want ." Mary hugged her friend. "I'm so glad for you."

"More good news," Shaheedah said.

"What? what?"

"My mother had a baby girl a few days ago. And I saw the whole thing," Shaheedah said.

"That's wonderful. What did she name her?"

"Hasina. And she's very beautiful, *Al-Hamdulillah*

"Just like her sister," Mary said, laughing. "And how's your mother doing? Is she well now ?"

"Oh, yes. She's her old self again. And I'm so happy to have a sister."

Shaheedah looked at Mary. The other news she had for her was going to be more difficult. The thought flashed through her mind that perhaps Mary was n't an only child after all. Perhaps her real mother had lots of children whom Mary had never known.

"Mary, I have some more news for you."

"Yeh, what? It couldn't be better than what you've already told me."

"This news may disturb you. And you must promise you won't ask me how I know. It's the truth, that's all," Shaheedah said with a look of sincerity. She glanced around the tent. "Can anyone hear us?"

Mary looked outside. "No, no one's around. What is it?"

"Mary, you are adopted," Shaheedah whispered.

"What? No, I'm not ." She was flustered.

"Yes, you are. And not only that, but you were

born in Lebanon to Lebanese parents."

Mary was stunned. She looked away, the news sinking in.

"So that's why I look so different from them," she said, referring to her adoptive parents. "But Lebanese people aren't blond like I am."

"Yes some of them are," Shaheedah reassured her, although she was not too sure herself.

"But there's one more thing." Shaheedah took a deep breath.

Mary stared blankly at her. She was in shock. Shaheedah clasped her hand tightly in hers.

"Your parents were Muslims, Which means you too are a Muslim who's been brought us as a christian, " Shaheedah said gently.

Mary jerked her hand away. She got up and walked a few feet towards the door. her shoulders shook. Shaheedah knew she was crying. She went to her and held her close, letting the warm tears fall onto her shoulder.

"It's alright, Mary ."

"It's not alright," Mary said between tears. "My father, I mean my adopted father, has kept me away from my true people. He's stripped me of my roots and heritage. No wonder I've always felt out of place. I've been living a lie." She stopped. Straightening up, wiping away the tears, Mary said, "How do you know this anyway?"

"I told you not to ask me that, " Shaheedah said . "I just know."

"But how could you know something about me that I don't even know?"

"I do. And one more thing. "Shaheedah ventured to tell her it all.

Mary sat down on the sand, her hands to her eyes. "What?" She asked with dread in her voice.

"your real name is zahida Abdul-Noor."

"Zahida," Mary repeated. "What does it mean?"

"Zahida means one who is devout, pious and prays alot. And Abdul- Noor means the servant of the light," Shaheedah explained.

"Zahida. I like that," Mary said. She looked up at Shaheedah. "What should I do now. Confront him?"

"No. I don't think that's a good idea . He'll want to know how you found out. Then he won't let you come to the wedding."

"But when?why? How could he do such a thing?"

"Perhaps your real mother couldn't take care of you. Maybe she was ill or something . Maybe it was the right thing at the time, " Shaheedah said, not believing a word herself . "In any case it's done. The question now is : What are you going to do ? Will you remain Mary O'Brien? Or will you find the real you?"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Shaheedah's announcement to Mary was good news for Shaheedah. During the next few weeks she daydreamed of Mary accepting Islam and the two of them becoming fast friends. She dreamed of them travelling the world together in search of Mary's real parents, with Jafar as their guide, of course.

The wedding was approaching. Too soon, Shaheedah thought. Soon I'll be a wife More than once she shook herself, mad at why she was getting married so young. But most of the time she shook herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming. Married! It was too good to be true. She would have a husband to love and someone to love her. They would spend so much time together, sharing the world's many wonders. She would never be lonely again.

As the days drew nearer, preparations were being made for the wedding. The bedouins made a big celebration for weddings as they marked the beginning of a new life. Also a celebration was made when a baby was born and had been done for Hasina. Her head had been shaved and the hair weighed to be given the equivalent in gold. A lamb had been slaughtered and distributed to Batul

and the poor in charity. It was a time to devote the newborn to the service of Allah and to relish in the miracle of birth. Weddings were no less meaningful.

Several women were sewing Shaheedah a beautiful wedding dress and veil. It had pearls and assorted beads all over it. Shaheedah went periodically to see its progress. She could not believe it was for her. The sleeves had tiny pearl buttons up to the elbows and the lace around the bottom of the dress and scattered over the veil was stunning. The color was a deep satin pearl color, not quite white. It wasn't until she tried it on at last, and heard the oohs and aahs, that she realized how truly ravishing it was. Of course, it was strictly within the limits of modesty, not form-fitting nor see-through and her hair and neck were covered exquisitely by the veil. She had never imagined a Muslim bride could be so beautiful and still stay within Islam's requirements.

Animals were being chosen for the feast. Sweets were being prepared - Baklava, Halva, pistashios, sherbert. The date and time were set and Shaheedah was nervous. She and Jafar had, throughout these weeks, talked alot. She was sure this was the right thing, what she truly wanted. Everyone was in agreement, from her mother to Batul to the shaikh, But somehow Shaheedah wanted more reassurance. She wanted her father's blessings.

Two days before the big event, Shaheedah went to see Mary to inform her of the time . Mary was very glad to see her.

"Guess what?" Mary said. "You were right . I asked Agnes, but swore her to secrecy. She confirmed everything you said."

"That was pretty dangerous," Shaheedah said,

concerned about Agnes knowing Mary knew. "So you're handling it alright now?"

"Well, I'm still pretty upset. But I've vowed to myself to search for my real parents as soon as I can."

"That's fantastic. Good luck. I wish I could help you," Shaheedah said. "And what about the wedding? Can you come?"

"Yes, I can," Mary said excitedly. "When is it?"

"The day after tomorrow, *insha'Allah*, at 1:00 in the afternoon right after prayers."

"Ok, I'll be there," Mary said.

"There are two things. You must come alone and you must dress properly and cover your hair. If you don't the bedouins won't let you in the camp," Shaheedah warned.

"Ok, but how do I find your place?" She asked.

"I've drawn a map. Ride a camel or horse and use a watch and compass. If you follow these instructions," Shaheedah said, handing her the map, "you'll have no problems, *insha'Allah*. See you there!" Shaheedah jumped on her camel.

"Hey, next time we meet," Mary said, "you'll be an old married lady." The girls laughed, made the secret sign and Shaheedah rode off, reflecting on Mary's words.

The wedding day finally arrived. The settlement was swarming with activity. Several women were making last minuted touch-ups on the dress. Faheemah, too, had beautiful dresses made for her and Hasina. She and Shaheedah sat together in the tent with Hasina lying between them.

"This is a great and joyous time," Shaheedah's mother began. "I have received a tiny baby and am losing my biggest baby. But in reality, I will never lose you, for you will always be closest to me,

shaheedah. " She paused. "I am so happy for you, my daughter." She wiped a few tears from her eyes.

Shaheedah hugged her mother. " I love you so much. And I thank you for teaching me all I know and helping me become the Muslim I am. You are a wonderful mother."

"Only a few pieces of advice," her mother said. "Allah made man and woman as partners for each other. You are compliments for each other and coverings like clothes. "Shaheedah recalled Jafar had used the same description. "Hide Jafar's faults from others and he will do the same for you. Never dwell on his shortcomings nor pick at him. Reflect on your own weaknesses and improve yourself. Advise him kindly and never as if he were a child.

"Obey your husband , unless he's asking you to go against Allah which I'm sure Jafar would never do, *insha' Allah*. If you always obey him, he will love you more and more. Never refuse him when he needs you. This will only drive him away, for men function more on the material level - physically - than women . If you're always ready for him he'll not be as demanding. It's like the child who never gets candy so everytime he sees some he wants it so much. But if he's saturated with it , he doesn't want it as often, only just to satisfy his sweet tooth. If you always refuse him or refuse him alot, he'll seek out other means to get what he wants or he'll try to hurt you emotionally, consciously or unconsciously. This is Allah's commands and he knows best.

"Try to keep the house nice as well as yourself. Although it's certainly not your job to do housekeeping, everything so in the house, if you do it for Allah, He will give you blessings. They are good deeds, not your responsibility. But I know you

will have no trouble in this respect because you've always been such a great help to me.

"spend some time alone together; enjoy yourselves. There is time for children, *insha'Allah*. If you two agree, have him seek advise on birth control from the shaikh and, of course, Batul and I are here for you.

"This is my advice to you, my daughter. You have grown and matured so much since we have been living here. I am very proud of you. Allah will be with you as long as you are on his path. Always have patience in times of hardship and always thank him every day. Do you have any questions?"

"No, Mother. Thank you for this advice."

"It's time to get ready," her mother said.

Shaheedah looked absolutely radiant. Everyone said so. As she emerged from the tent, the women made so much noise, gasping and exclaiming she felt like ducking back inside. Shaheedah got a hold on herself and stood a few seconds, surveying the crowd. Every one was there her mother, Batul, her brothers. Yes, there was Mary. And how lovely she looked in her scarf and long dress. Shaheedah made the secret gestures to her and wondered why she was looking at her so funny.

Someone took her by the elbow and spun her around. Shaheedah looked up into the face of her father. She could not believe it. As they hugged and hugged he gently wiped her tears of joy away.

"I missed you Shaheedah," he said looking more handsome than she had remembered.

Her father led her to the center of the group. Desert flowers were strewn all about. A lavish carpet was laid for her to sit on and the Qur'an

rested open on a small wooden stand. Shaheedah sat and read silently . Soon Jafar came and sat a few feet away on her right side. She could not look at him, she was so nervous.

Shaikh al-deen approached and sat before them. He performed the simple ceremony. It was all over in a few minutes. She was married. Jafar took her hand and placed a beautiful gold wedding band on her finger. Then all the women rushed up to her, hugging, kissing, crying.

The festivities began but Shaheedah was too excited to eat anything . She searched the multitude for Mary.

"I'm so glad you came," she told Mary.

"You are so gorgeous. And the wedding was so simple and nice, " Mary said. "Oh, here comes your husband." She winked at Shaheedah.

"Can I talk to you a minute?" Jafar asked Shaheedah. They moved away from Mary .

"I love you Shaheedah . We will be happy together," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes and I love you, :she said surprised at how easy the words flowed.

"Tomorrow we will leave here *insha'Allah*, " he said.

"Why ?"

"We must. Please trust me. I'll make you very happy."

Shaheedah looked into his eyes. She knew he would. "I must say good bye to Mary ," she said .

"Yes ." Jafar released her hand.

Shaheedah returned to her friend.

"I have to leave now, " Mary said.

"Wait, Mary. I have to tell you something . "But she could not bring herself to say good-bye. She would never see her friend again. They had grown so close to each other. She would never know if Mary chose Islam and found her parents.

"What is it ?" Mary asked.

"Oh, Nothing. " She made the secret sign and kissed Mary on the cheek. "See you, friend, *insha'Allah.*"

Shaheedah cried softly as Mary rode away, her scarf fluttering in the breeze. At least I have found my real self, Shaheedah reflected as she thumbed the small bottle of Kuwaiti sand in a pocket of her dress.

END
