

AUGUST RAIN

A Novel By



ABDULMAJID DABBAS



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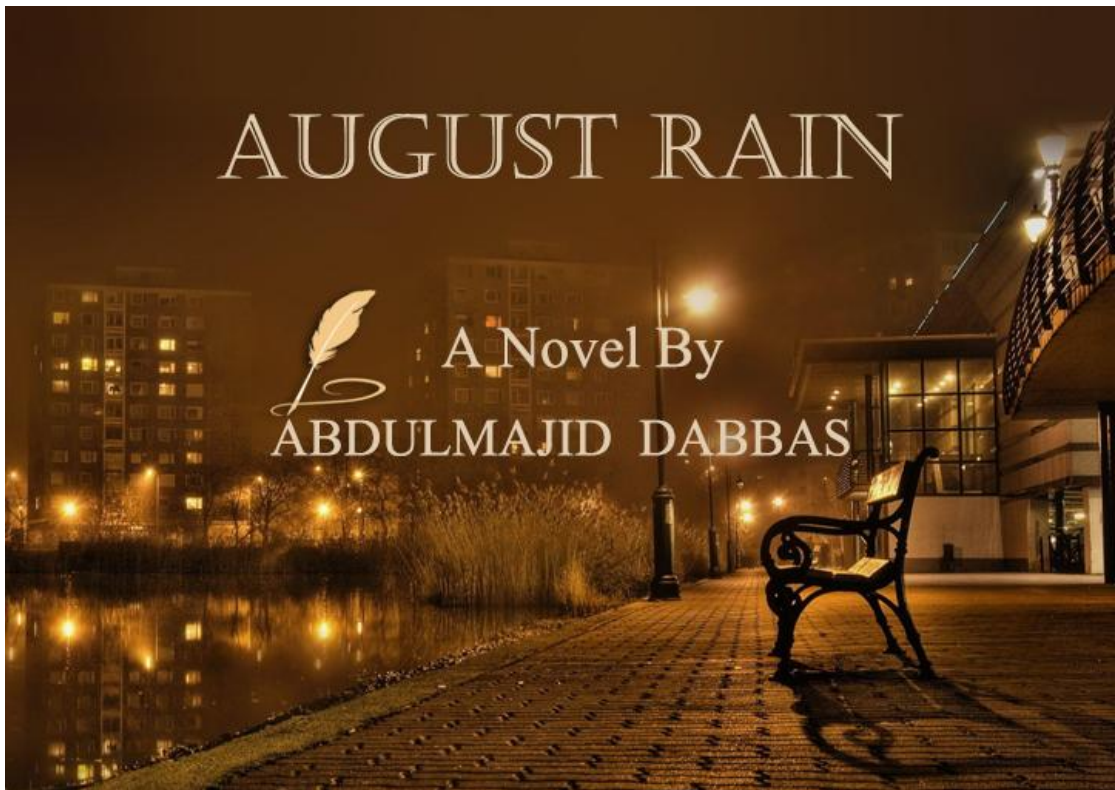
DEDICATION

I bow my head and my pen respectfully and majestically to the memory of the soul of my brother, Abdulkarim, who was to me as a father and a friend and who guided me through the dark and dreadful nights of life.

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Chapter 1

What had broken through his agitation? Jamil wondered as he glanced up from the telegram in his clenched fist and looked about him. His eyes fell upon the willowy blonde a few feet to his right. Vibrantly feminine, she seemed to be gazing at him with a curious, half-smile. Fixing his gaze on her twinkling blue eyes, he wondered whether she had heard him and was amused by his expression of disgust. No, impossible! He had spoken under his breath and in his native tongue, "The vile, stinking pig! He has probably penned down somewhere with somebody just like himself."

Jamil took another cautious look in the blonde's direction and saw a friendly smile light up her face. A cursory glance revealed an almost angelic face framed by an attractive summer hat. Was she just a pick-up looking for a mark? He prayed to the Almighty God from the bottom of his heart that such elegance and beauty would not be so used. Such a thought would most definitely sadden him and distort his sense of aesthetics, virtue and beauty. He smiled back as if to say, "Hello."

"Hello, again. I was beginning to think you didn't recognize me!" The young lady spoke in a friendly and very cultured voice.

"Now how could any man forget such a lovely face and charming smile?" Jamil stammered, a tentative smile spreading over his face.

"Oh, don't worry. I don't blame you considering our peculiar meeting. Please don't be embarrassed; I understand." She blushed as she watched him wipe his brow with the back of his hand as though rubbing flint to spark his memory.

Attempting to conceal his confusion, Jamil said, "Only a blind man can be forgiven for failing to appreciate a masterpiece of art shaped by the greatest of artists, Allah!"

"The night we met," she replied, "you were in rather bad shape, so it isn't any wonder that you don't remember." She came a step closer and continued, "When I saw you at the Los Angeles International Airport, I tried to catch your eye, but couldn't. Now I realize you wouldn't have known me anyway."

"Oh! You're the young lady I met in the Arabic nightclub in Hollywood. How stupid of me! How could I forget? Oh, how embarrassing. Please forgive me." Wiping the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, Jamil confessed that he was

sometimes angered and provoked by memory lapses. "I forgive it if it fails me in minor cases, but to fail me in remembering a woman like you..."

"Oh, don't overdo it, but thanks for the compliment. I know I'm not worthy of the praise."

"Your gracious humbleness adds another virtue to your elegance," Jamil said. The young lady blushed and smiled, then looked down to avoid his devouring eyes. He continued in a poetic mode. "I feel that my thirsty soul, parched heart, and arid emotions are quenched by the deep well of your beauty, and my previously stagnant feelings are invigorated until they once again pulse with life. As my mind emerges from beneath layers of rusty corrosion, it is once again a shining mirror. I am sustained by the nourishment of beauty, and I am addicted to its perfumed air."

The young lady burst out laughing, managing to reply, "Thank you very much! You are so kind and gentle, but you speak as though possessed by a muse."

"I am no longer a poet. I used to write a few lyrical poems, but I am long out of practice. However, my spontaneous utterances seem to betray my poet's heart. I'm still enraptured by beauty. I worship at its shrines."

Without allowing him an opportunity to continue, the young lady said, "Well, I only wanted to wish you luck during your stay in my country and at the conference, too."

She glanced at her watch, and suddenly Jamil knew she must not get away. This time was his golden opportunity. He grabbed the chance and said, "Please, won't you have a cup of coffee or tea with me? It seems to me that destiny is trying mighty hard to get us re-acquainted."

"Well, you could be right. Yes, I'd like a cup of tea."

"Thank you very, very much. You are polite and generous," he said enthusiastically.

After extensive deliberation in the airport cafeteria, the young lady insisted on having only a cup of tea accompanied by a piece of cake. Jamil had the same. According to her, this was Professor Jamil Dahshan's second meeting with her. But according to his deepest subconscious, he had seen her many times! When and where? Unfortunately, he could not remember. He had no idea who she might be, but was willing to keep her company until he became enlightened once again.

He had improved himself much since they had first met at a nightclub. This time he was not drunk, and they were not sitting together in a corner of an airport

lounge. He could now see just how utterly beautiful and majestic this rare piece of art really was. He listened to the sound of her voice rather than hearing the words, watched her crimson lips move, and noted the elegances of her hands and her blue eyes in which he could almost see his reflection. Her supple blonde hair covered and rested on her shoulders. There she was. . . a living, breathing beauty sitting in front of him, interacting with him and breathing his breath. She was a work of incomparable art, proof of the Greatest Creator, God the Almighty! Hallelujah!

"I need to warn you that the conference venue has changed to Oxford. It is not here in London," Jamil said.

"Oh! Is that so?" the young lady replied. "I was looking forward to attending some of the lectures."

"Don't worry. The lectures will be the same," Jamil continued. "I owe you an explanation for that night we met at the Arabic nightclub. It isn't often that one has the chance to ask for forgiveness. I am not in the habit of being drunk in public, but that night was an exception. Believe me, every time I think of it, I feel ashamed of myself to the bone for the uncivilized manner in which I conducted myself! May I explain?" He pleaded.

"Please do. My curiosity is aroused." The young lady leaned forward anxiously, awaiting his explanation.

Jamil proceeded. "It had been an unusually hot day. I had decided on a drive along the coast to cool off, as I usually like to do on such days. The sunshine was lovely. As I passed through Malibu Beach on my return, I chose to have lunch in a small place built partially over the water. It was a place I often stopped to have dinner. Sometimes I brought company, but most times I was alone. I pulled into a space against the wall facing the sun, and for a few additional moments lost myself in the golden path the sinking sun had laid on the water. I watched transfixed, humbly witnessing the beauty of nature, waiting until the last trace of the sun's blood-red haze had been dissolved by the oncoming night and disappeared slowly behind the distant horizon."

"What a beautiful and charming description! You have a powerful command of the English language," the young lady said.

"Thank you! I reached to check my right door, when in the car next to me I saw a man's back and a woman's suntanned arms around his neck in an embrace. As I straightened, her eyes looked directly into mine, and I recognized the wife of my best

friend in America. I had put my trust in this particular friend for whom I held a great deal of respect, love, and admiration. I cherished his wide knowledge, genuine humility, and highly ethical moral standards.” Jamil noticed that the radiant smile on his guest's face had disappeared and a look of sadness and sorrow had replaced it. Therefore he decided to quickly continue on with his lengthy explanation.

“His most admirable trait was that he was a self-less humanitarian! His love for people, his help for the needy, and the unlimited assistance he gave me while I was suffering from loneliness and homesickness is unequaled by anyone else I have known. He tried hard to find a publisher for my writings and counseling for my emotional problems. He has been the reason behind my success in many cases. I looked up to him as my teacher and my idol.”

"Poor little chap! It must have been very hard on you!" she said.

"Yes, it was awful! Anyhow, the woman drew back into the protection of the man's arms. Then I saw that she was actually holding him to herself, preventing him from turning to follow her gaze. Curious as to why, I took a good look at the man's head, and it dawned on me that he was a colleague, a visiting professor from Turkey. I retreated, appetite forgotten. I guess I just drove around and around aimlessly. At that moment I was desperately aware of my loneliness and avoided returning to my apartment. I knew I needed company to obliterate the memory of that shocking scene. Otherwise I might lose my mind and run amok! I headed back to Hollywood, turned into the drive on Sunset Boulevard, and we both know the horrible truth about what happened next. Please accept my apology.”

"It is always hard to be alone in sadness or distress,” the young lady said with a comforting voice while pushing back a lock of hair which had fallen into her eyes.

“My friend and his wife had been married only a few months although they had lived together for more than five years. They were considered the ideal couple.” Jamil paused as he sipped some tea. "I don't know how much alcohol I had consumed by the time I spotted you. I strangely felt that you understood and could sympathize with me that night. Your angelic smile and warm looks soothed my emotions and revived pleasant memories,” he complimented.

"I appreciate your confiding in me, and only feel very sorry I could not have been of more help when it was needed. I understood a lot of what you told me that night. But whenever you touched on the subject of your sorrow, you would become incoherent,” she said.

"I hope I didn't embarrass you badly in front of the other woman at your table."

"I am sure she understood. She is my best friend. Her name is Elizabeth," she assured. "Nothing that evening was officially planned, so a few of us from the tour decided to go to Hollywood to a night spot. They left the choice up to me. Since I have a dear friend in the Arabian Gulf just now, I decided on that particular place. At present he is training Qatari pilots to use Royal Air Force Tornado Units and helping the Qatar government to construct an air force. The only tables available had seats for only two people at a time, so we all had to spread out. It was certainly an enjoyable occasion, but I was thinking of leaving when you approached our table."

"Well, I am certain you danced with me only to keep me from making a scene. I was truly unaware of myself. I have little or no recollection of my actions or words that night. Thank you again for your great kindness and understanding, I am indebted to you and apologize warmly," Jamil said.

"Believe me, I had no hard feelings towards you. On the contrary, I felt sad and depressed. My eyes did not close in sleep until the dawn of the next day," the young lady said sincerely. "I would like to ask a question, if you have no objection. I saw your anger over the telegram when we entered the airport building. Is anything wrong?"

Jamil was exceedingly happy to hear her compliments, but decided to say nothing in response. Instead he withdrew the paper from his pocket, straightened its folds and set it on the table facing her. She read:

TO JAMIL DAHSHAN: DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND MY CONTROL
I AM UNABLE TO MEET YOU. STAY IN LONDON TONIGHT AND PROCEED
TO OXFORD BY TRAIN TOMORROW. TELEPHONE UPON
ARRIVAL...ZAYNON.

Jamil had received the telegram after exiting passport control. After hearing his name called over the loudspeaker, he had made his way to the information desk where a lady handed him an envelope from the British Airlines with his name, flight number and arrival time on it. It contained Zaynon's apology and had been transcribed from a telephone message rung through at 8:20 a.m. from Oxford.

"Well, that isn't entirely bad news, is it?" the young lady inquired.

"Not if his excuse is genuine," Jamil found his tongue saying.

"What do you mean?" the young lady inquired, gazing at his face.

Suddenly Jamil realized he had committed a dreadful mistake. How could he tell her that he held a strong conviction that his friend was lying, and that he knew the real reason. May Allah curse him! Jamil felt ashamed to even think of his suspicions, let alone blurt them out to a total stranger.

"I mean...I am very disappointed! I am eager to see him after a long separation," he said as he stumbled to make an excuse for his lack of loyalty to Zaynon.

"I understand! I once had this experience, except the person who was to meet me was my mother." The young lady granted Jamil a heavenly smile and said, "Now you can see London at night. Have you been here before?"

"No," he answered. "In fact, this is the first time my feet have touched British soil. I have heard much about it. I intend to make the most of my first visit!" Jamil said, enthusiastically.

"Ever since I was a little girl, I have preferred London at night. Walking down its long, broad streets always gives me a delightful sensation. If you wish, I could recommend some very interesting places you might enjoy seeing this evening," the young lady offered modestly.

Grabbing his chance, Jamil suggested, "I have an idea! If you are not busy, would you be kind enough to show me some of the interesting spots about town? I would very much like to see them with you." Then he added, "Of course, if you want to be home with loved ones, I would most certainly understand." He secretly prayed for the right answer from her.

"Well, I'll admit I actually miss my parents. I couldn't wait any longer, so I decided to surprise them by coming home three days early. They won't be expecting me today at all. I would enjoy showing you around my favorite city."

Jamil was excited to have such a beautiful and gracious hostess! "How lucky I am! I am sure to be the happiest man alive to have the privilege and honor of being shown the most magnificent London by such a beautiful young lady. How could I possibly fail to appreciate and not be delighted? Indeed it is a privilege."

"You have showered me with such beautiful compliments! Thank you very much."

The young lady's charming smile made Jamil feel arrows of love penetrate his heart. After recovering his breath he said, "Can you believe, I don't even remember your name? I have a very bad memory concerning names! You may have mentioned it to me when we were at the nightclub, but I am sorry to say that I have forgotten it."

"How thoughtless of me!" she replied with sarcastic good humor. "With the condition you were in that night, I'd be surprised if you could remember anything except for what you called the 'tragedy' of your friend. My name is Amanda Hamilton," she said, moving her chair to stand.

When Jamil saw her gather her purse and gloves, he stood also and inquired, "Won't you share my taxi downtown if you go that way? Perhaps you would be good enough to recommend a hotel on the way?"

"Just recommending a hotel in London will not do. We must have a reservation first from here in the airport. London is very crowded in the summer. It is difficult to find a vacancy. We might spend hours looking for a hotel before finding one, and it might only be only three or four stars. Just follow me."

"God bless my friend's heart!" Jamil said. "If I had known Zaynon was not going to meet me and that I would have to stay in London, I would have made a hotel reservation long before I left California."

"These things happen! Don't worry. With a little looking, we will find one," Miss Hamilton said most reassuringly.

They wandered over to the hotel reservations desk. Jamil's hostess checked the list of recommended hotels. After satisfying herself about price and location, she made the booking for Jamil.

Miss Hamilton suggested taking a bus or the tube (subway), but Jamil said he preferred a taxi because he did not want to waste time by going from one station to another. As they entered the cab, Jamil's hostess spoke to the driver. Although he was straining to eavesdrop on the conversation, he could not distinguish the name and the address she gave. The exotic young lady settled back and asked about the friend whose telegram she had read. "What does your friend do in Oxford? Is he in any way connected with the university?"

"Yes, Zaynon is working in a small private museum that has a connection with the university." He paused for a second and added, "From what he says in his letters, he is very happy with what he is doing. Zaynon is very ambitious and always plays the high-flyer in spite of the fact that his father was very poor, a peasant. We both started from scratch. We have been very close friends for several years now. We both left our homeland four years ago. Zaynon came to England and I went to The United States of America for a better opportunity, though that was not the only reason." Jamil paused. They sat in silence for a moment. "You might say we were both driven from our homeland by the curse of ambition and dissatisfaction."

"On our first evening together in the nightclub you mentioned you were an Arabic professor in a university. Did you say you taught Near Eastern subjects?"

"Yes. I teach Near Eastern history, politics, civilization and art," Jamil clarified.

"Is the conference the reason for your being in England?"

"Yes, the main reason. It starts next Monday and runs the whole of next week. The theme is centered on Islam and the Muslim religion. Topics center on reasons for the sudden violence which is not essential to Islamic teaching and whether or not Islam is keeping in step with modern trends. I am the representative sent from my university."

"I read that the Islamic Religion is a religion of love, mercy, compassion, brotherhood, fraternity, equality and liberty. It has always urged obedience to the law. Why the sudden change? Why the recent violence, bloodshed and terrorism?" Miss Hamilton asked.

"Fanaticism and violence has always been exercised by some groups of people in every religion since the beginning of time," Jamil said. "But what is conveniently packaged and labeled today as radical 'Islamic Fundamentalism' is the product of Arabic and Islamic dictatorships that have smothered their people, repressed their traditions, subjugated their beliefs and forcibly impressed fanaticism and violence into their souls. This manipulation of the people was supported by America and the Western World as they encouraged some of our backward rulers in order to humiliate their citizens, confiscate their freedom, crush their humanity and eliminate their political rights. Western and American intervention culminated during and before the first Gulf War when they harvested the fruits of the New World Order."

"I read that the terrible massacres and destruction in some North African regimes were caused by their not accepting the outcomes of elections and ignoring the results because they had received notification from some European country that the policies of the winning party would be in conflict with the interests of the Western World," Miss Hamilton said.

"That happened not only in those countries but also in every Arab and Islamic country," Jamil said. "It is still happening. The rulers carry out instructions from their European and American masters who want certain parties to rule the country."

"They must hate us," she said.

"I doubt they do. As a matter of fact, many of them like you very much; but they hate your rulers for sure."

As the cab pulled into the curb in front of an attractive, enormous building, Jamil said, "I'll be waiting in the lobby at six o'clock." Glancing at his watch he added, "That is about six hours and ten minutes from now. Be sure to choose the very best restaurant for dinner. I want my first evening in London to be very special and memorable. I never want to forget. It must stand out against other memories for the rest of my life. I love many things in life, and food is one I hold close to my heart. The rest of the time is in your hands."

"I thought the only thing close to your heart was beauty," Miss Hamilton said in a devilish way.

"When both beauty and food are loved by a man, it means that he has reached the highest good!" Jamil said and then chuckled. He took care of the fare and stepped onto the curb. As the cab pulled away, he raised his hand and in return received a lovely smile.

"Oh, Amanda Hamilton, my elegant and dignified Venus! I have found you after an exhausting and despairing search. You are a goddess of romance and inspiration! Where have you been all these long years? My childhood dreams and imaginations of English girls who were elegant, well educated, compassionate, tall, slim, blond and blue eyed with ruby lips like jujube fruit are now fulfilled and symbolized in you," Jamil thought, addressing his mental image of her.

Chapter 2

Professor Dahshan was in the lobby a little before the hour and had read the better part of an article that detailed Muslim radical groups and their ideological program of violence and extremism, a program with which Jamil disagreed wholeheartedly. In fact, if the article had not been written by a Westerner or sponsored by a Western publishing house, Jamil would have assumed it was the product of the same radicals that the article discussed.

Just then Big Ben struck six! A long look in the direction of the entrance did not reveal Miss Amanda Hamilton, so he finished the last paragraph. The writer assured his readers, in accord with other writers' opinions, that he had reached the conclusion that the reasons for most of the violence, destruction and bloodshed were some of the Arab and Muslim rulers themselves. They believed strongly that they were absolute and infallible; their words and judgments were inspired by God the Almighty; they had the right to treat their people like vermin. He suggested that encouraging the leaders to develop a limited democracy and adopt a bill of rights for the people would resolve various tragic situations over night.

The impatient young man laid the article aside and walked around the hotel lounge. As he stopped to admire a large painting, handsomely framed and effectively lighted, he felt eyes on his back. Miss Hamilton stood just a little inside the door and was smiling in an amused and majestic way. The happy young man was momentarily unable to step towards her as a result of being so overwhelmed by the vision of loveliness and charm standing before him.

Her hair, now uncovered, shone, flowing with golden lights to her shoulders, as if she were carrying a treasure of diamonds and rubies. The creamy, delicate complexion, sporting only faintly colored lips and cheeks, was soft and inviting. Her large eyes, were so blue, so clear, and so radiant that they reminded him of a deep blue lake he had seen two summers before in Washington state near the rain forest, where he had stood for more than two hours, gazing breathlessly, absorbed by the magnificent beauty of nature!

He felt on that day that he was inside one of God's temples performing religious rituals. The beauty of God's creation enthralled him, and he felt rapture at this spiritual unification.

A stormy shower of burning tears flowed down his cheeks, and wet his shirt. Due to his upbringing and subconscious convictions, Jamil imagined that those tears were a gift from Allah before whom he knelt humbly and respectfully, glorifying and exalting Allah Almighty in His high heaven.

If the English goddess was aware of admiring eyes from all parts of the lobby, she gave no sign. A movement to unbutton the beautiful white satin coat broke the spell for Jamil and he advanced to a spot right in front of Amanda the better to continue his admiration and worship of her statuesque beauty. His breath quickened, his blood boiled, and adrenaline heightened his impulses. His heart beat a fast tattoo that surely she could hear and see. His knees grew increasingly weak. Her eyes were twinkling now with amusement and he had to smile back at her with a look full of impish pleasure.

"Come, our cab is waiting and I am very hungry." she stated, taking her place by his side as they went out.

"I am starving too," he thought to himself, "but not for food."

As Miss Hamilton leaned back after giving the destination to the driver, her lovely floral scent filled the space, arousing Jamil's senses, sending his memory off on a reverie of other scented lovelies he had for a short time admired, yes, worshiped. They were women of many colorings, backgrounds, types and temperaments, each with a fragrance seemingly all her own. All had been made to yield their scented treasures to him if he so desired them.

This cool beauty by his side was no better than the others, but there did seem to be more of the ethereal about her; something more feminine in her beauty, more warmth mixed charmingly with that cultured reserve. It excited him and intoxicated his senses, tickled his manhood, satisfied his inferior ego, and stirred his blood to be so near to her. She would be quite a challenge!

"Oh Allah; thank you so dearly for what you have given us of beauty, elegance and grace! You are always good to me! I know it is because of my mother's prayers!"

The restaurant was unobtrusively elegant and aristocratic. Jamil was fully aware of the soft light and candle glow from the tables. He saw massive chandeliers

hanging higher than usual with their abundance of glass drops sparkling in their circles like oriental diadems. His eyes devoured the familiar paintings displayed in massive antique frames against the quiet good taste of green velvet walls.

Watching the handsome man's admiration, the English beauty said in appreciation, "I chose this place partially for its lovely atmosphere. However the real reason will be more than obvious when dinner arrives. They have a wonderful steak if you like. My father comes here especially for it." After a short pause she added, "My parents celebrate most of their important events, such as anniversaries and birthdays, at this restaurant, and many times they have asked me to join them."

As the wine steward waited, Romeo addressed his Juliet. "I would love very much to grace the occasion of being with you. How do you feel about a bottle of champagne to commemorate the dearest and most memorable occasion in my life so far?"

"That sounds like a fitting compliment to your first evening in London. Besides, I am very fond of it and I shun hard alcohol."

She slid gracefully out of the coat. As it fell back over the chair, Jamil felt as a physical blow the impact of her stunning beauty. The hot-pink chiffon dress was now revealed and the low neckline showed off her long elegant neck and throat to perfection. She could be the daughter of a goddess. The soft, draped material fell in and out in a ruffle, like the curve of her breasts, giving the impression of the ruffled petals of some exquisite flower, her graciously curved neck and throat rising out of the petals like some lovely bud ending in the golden flowering of her hair.

The Middle Eastern fellow could not help but observe the innocent aspects of her being. Yet how sensual and voluptuous she seemed to be deep down with out even being aware of it or of the effect and impact it was having on him. "I am toasting to you; the most beautiful, most charming, and the most desirable lady in this place, which is a most appropriate setting." Jamil lifted his glass and added, "To my Ashtoreth! May the Almighty grant you a happy and prosperous life!"

"To your evening in London; may it not be your last," she answered, her glass lifted to his.

"May it bond us in friendship and respect," Jamil said, after having downed another glass of champagne. He was already half drunk on her charm and beauty before he'd even touched the glass. The fragrance of her perfume, her elegant beauty,

the sweetness of her words, and the charm of her femininity drew him into oceans of complete happiness.

"Professor Dahshan!" the happy young lady said, her eyes illuminated with admiration, "you have a masterful command of English; it is literary and mature. I wish I could choose my words with such sensitive precision, and I'm a daughter of the English language! Were it not for your accent and distinctive curly hair, few people would realize English was not your mother tongue." The compliment was far from being lost on the lover who felt a childish urge to match it.

"Thank you, very much for the compliment. I consider your praise a shining medal which I hang proudly on my chest, a prize won from a cultured, suave young lady, warmed by my heart." Jamil, joyful in receiving such a compliment, was profuse with replies. "Since childhood I have taken great pleasure from words, in both English and Arabic. I lift words from the dictionary, carefully turning them over in my mind, observing all their nuances, touching and testing their sharp edges or soft significance. I can pour over a dictionary for days. For me words are the equivalent of a rare artistic masterpiece. I chase words as I would chase beautiful girls."

"I didn't know you chase girls, Professor Dahshan," she interjected and followed with a chuckle.

"Only those nymphs from Paradise who possess your charm, beauty and elegance and subdue my mind with their gentle, zebroid eye," Jamil said. "I kneel humbly and respectfully to the Almighty who kindly and generously presented them to us as gifts to love and adore."

"Am I one of them?" she asked.

"You are their crowned queen!" he replied enthusiastically.

"Thank you, professor Dahshan! You cause me to float among the clouds with your charming praises. I always believed that beauty is in the eye of the beholder," she said.

Jamil hardly noticed; he was lost in the past. "Sometimes I have stood for hours in front of a painting contemplating, searching for the key, the meaning, the inspiration of the artist when his brush first touched the canvas. Or I'd lose my self, entranced by the lilting melodies of a singer's captivating performance. Tears would flow heavily; I would be lost for hours because of its impact on my feelings and inflamed emotions." Jamil uttered his words slowly and strongly with deep conviction, using his hands to help express his thoughts.

"You really are a genuine artist," the young lady replied, caught up in the weight of the moment and its sincerity.

"Thank you once again. Your responses humor me, and I am indeed proud. How long did you have on your tour of the States? Did you enjoy your visit?" Jamil queried.

"The tour was planned for four weeks, and in that time we covered the high points of interest. Yes, I liked it very much." She paused and then continued dreamily, "I liked especially the wide open heart of America and all the beautiful colors painting her vast lonely spaces, her deserts and mountains. I fell in love with the magnificent Redwoods so stately protective and so wise with age. I liked the coastline of the western states all the way to Canada."

She paused as though waiting for a reply. When none came she went on in a hesitant manner. "I did not find the large cities as enchanting as I had thought I would. They do not have the charm of London, nor its elegance and beauty; they leave you feeling cold and empty. I liked the people and their hospitable, friendly, easy-going manner, especially those of the farming land and small towns. In the cities there seemed to be an undercurrent of rush, and their people reflected this tension and strain in their faces and attitudes. I did not like the feel of this."

Amanda paused, smiling as Jamil filled her glass. Her face took on a look of girlish shyness, a beseeching look as though she were asking for understanding. "The last three days of the tour I could not bear to be away from home one moment longer. Like a silly, homesick schoolgirl I impulsively took the first plane with a cancellation," she confessed.

"That does not surprise me in the least. I know all about that disease. I suffered severely from it. A few weeks after my arrival in America, I spent twenty-four hours sobbing and crying continuously and did not stop until my soul was touched by the mercy of heaven. Only then did I sleep."

"I am sorry to hear that," she added sympathetically.

"Perhaps a special man was waiting for your return?" Jamil spoke half-jokingly, half in statement and half in question. He saw the young lady glance away from his searching look and realized his mistake. In an attempt to lift the weight of his innocent words he said, "What I mean is, perhaps you knew a lonely Arab man would be stranded in your great city needing your concern, affection and help one more time!"

The waiter bent politely and Jamil ordered the steak for both of them and quietly apologized. "I am extremely sorry about my comment. It was a poor joke. Forgive me! I am so happy being with you. I find myself lost for words," he said, leaning forward.

"Certainly. But there is really no need to apologize. No need at all. There is a man. He ..."

Jamil's hand stretched forward in protest at her words, "No, please, you needn't explain. I apologize again for my bad taste and ill manner."

As they ate in silent appreciation, the Jamil, wishing to lighten the look on Amanda's face and bring back the pleasant mood said, "You know a lot about me, but I'd like to hear all about you. For instance, what keeps you busy?"

"Well, the amazing thing is," she began, "that I am also a teacher. I, too, have taught history for several years in secondary school and enjoyed it very much. I don't know as much as I should about the Middle East, but I could claim to have a fair knowledge about its problems!"

"Cultural and intellectual prejudices against Islam still pervade Western understandings since its spread in the Arabian Peninsula fifteen hundred years ago. The Arab world, for instance, is seen as a place of terrorism, religious fanaticism and revolting dictators," Jamil said.

"Unfortunately it is true!" she replied.

"You know that most of our acute problems have been caused by your country as a result of the Balfour Declaration in the year 1918 that divided our country into insignificant principalities and led to the creation of the state of Israel in the heart of our country," he said.

She nodded her head several times without so much as uttering a single word. A cloud of silence hung over both of them for a minute or two, and then suddenly she said, "As a history major and teacher also, I have read a good number of books about the Islamic religion written by European scholars. Most of them are in agreement that Islam is a religion which promotes peace, love, forgiveness, fraternity, equality and brotherhood. It condemns violence, fighting and totalitarianism, encourages good deeds, provides welfare and calls for justice regardless of race, color or creed. What then is the inspiration for violent fundamentalists?" Amanda asked once again.

"The Muslim rulers themselves are the reason for these accusations," Jamil explained, repeating his earlier explanation.

"I don't understand," she inquired with an astonished look on her radiant face.

"Each Muslim ruler obtained power one of two ways: by inheritance from his father or by a military coup overthrowing the government. Not a one of them obtained power by the electoral process. Besides, any election would result in a false win with the existing ruler receiving the most votes. The rulers are tyrants and dictators and stop at nothing to retain their positions. What we have in the Muslim world is injustice, dictatorship, frustration, poverty, oppression, absence of democracy and no freedom of speech!"

"That's awful!" she said sadly.

"Yes, it's horrifying," Jamil agreed. "Unfortunately the Western World, instead of advising those rulers to change, encourages them and supports them!" Amanda did not comment and was withdrawn inwardly, contemplating what her companion had said.

"I find teaching very stimulating and inspiring," she said, "My mother is also a teacher. She teaches botany at London University. I was brought up, you could say, religiously observant, but not fanatically. I was taught from childhood that our bodies and souls are sacred and are given to us by the Lord as gifts, and that we should respect them and preserve them only for those we love dearly. We should not abuse them by indulging in false pleasure and superficial enjoyments, hence cheapening them. I do not attend church, but I observe the teaching of my religion and help others to observe theirs. I have never smoked, and have noticed you do not either. I drink very lightly and only on certain occasions."

"You have made me feel very happy. I hope one day to find a wife who possesses your qualities and can stimulate me the way you do," Jamil replied.

"You are a charming and charismatic young man with a wonderful future to offer. I can't see how any woman could resist your charm, let alone your proposal. Besides, my good friend, there are many more beautiful women than I." When Jamil did not comment, Amanda continued, "When we met at the nightclub, I was drinking Seven-Up. My parents love and respect me dearly, and I, in turn, idealize them. I live with them in an old, very cozy house with plenty of land surrounding it. I love our house very much and have no heart to move somewhere else!"

"Why would you ever think of moving elsewhere when you can freely indulge in the love of your parents and the countryside at your leisure anytime you need or wish to do so? If I were you, I would never want to leave," Jamil said.

"I am sure father had mother's love for flowers in mind when he bought it many years ago. She spends every minute of her leisure time taking care of the flowers. It is her highest pleasure to be among them watching them grow. She is an expert in her field. My father is a retired Royal Air Force officer. Our home is overrun with mother's green life and father's books," she said.

"No wonder, then, that your mother gave birth to such a beautiful flower. Are there any more blooms to her credit?"

Amanda laughed. "No, I am the only one; and I am very sure mother never thought of me as a treasured blossom. More likely she considered me a weed needing to be pulled from her favorite flower beds where I once insisted on playing with my small dog, Bogar. I wish I had a brother or sister. Have you either?"

Jamil's voice seemed to chill suddenly, as he answered, "I have two brothers older than myself, and five sisters, two of whom are younger than I."

"How wonderful for you and your parents that you have them! What does your father do?" she inquired, in a tender and sweet, musical voice.

"My father died when I was just a small boy. I can't remember him too well," Jamil confessed. "He was a land owner. Karim, my eldest brother, is about five years older than I, and I have always viewed him as a second father. He took care of all of us: mother, sisters, and brothers. He had to leave his education-he quit before finishing secondary school-and found a job so he could feed the family and send me to school."

Jamil remembered how deeply and severely he suffered emotionally and physically as a young boy without a father! The pain penetrated all of his being and left a dark long scar in his heart, burning for all time. He recalled a very painful and grievous incident which took place when he was a young boy. It was the first summer after his father's death, and he and all the members of his family were spending a two-month summer vacation in their huge vineyard not far from their town, as they used to do when his father was living. It was their first week there when one of the uncles, just released from five years in prison, came and insulted his mother, beat Jamil and his brothers and sisters and then exiled them from the vineyard, their sanctuary, their refuge, causing them to return home. He claimed that Jamil's father had promised to give him part of his vineyard one day. But Jamil knew it was a lie.

They all cried for several days and didn't recover until their grandmother and her spinster daughter came and took them to their small vineyard to spend the summer

vacation with them. Years later, after Jamil had graduated from the university and become a distinguished figure in Jordanian society, the wife of the same uncle came to Jamil's sister and told her that if Jamil would marry her only daughter, he would be given a big piece of land as a gift. The tragic humor was that the piece of land which would be given to Jamil as a bribe was one of many pieces of land that her husband had confiscated from Jamil's family.

"Talking about the love of flowers," Jamil said, breaking the silence. "My friend in Oxford is very fond of growing flowers. He wrote me to tell me that he has a lovely garden."

"How interesting!" she said. "From watching Mother, it seems to be a very enjoyable hobby! Were his father or mother flower fans?"

"No, not at all. He learned gardening from an English friend who was working in Jordan as an archeology expert."

"His friend must be very old," Miss Hamilton said. "This hobby is usually practiced, at least in Europe, by older people because it requires a lot of time and patience. Is your friend old?"

"I don't know what you mean by old. He is my age."

"No! By old I mean middle aged, because one is usually occupied with work, traveling, or raising children when he is younger."

"He told me one time that his flowers are his children." Jamil chuckled.

"Why did he call them that?"

"Because I wrote him that he should get married. I know that was his family's dearest wish, especially his mother's."

"It seems to me that mothers are the same the world over. They want to see their children get married."

"In the Arab and Muslim world the person is not considered accomplished unless he has a wife and children, even if he owns the wealth of the world," Jamil said.

"I like that belief! It gives one the feelings of satisfaction and security, peace and tranquility," she said.

"The usual, Miss Hamilton?" The waiter interrupted.

"No pudding tonight! We are very full," she answered with a smile and a shake of her head. After pausing mid-sentence she added, "Maybe you'd like some, Professor Dahshan?"

"No, thank you. I am also very full," he said, placing his right hand over his belly. "You must come here quite often," Jamil said. "I can understand why! The food is excellent."

"Yes, I do, with my parents and friends. The last time I was here was just before my tour. I was with Paul his last night in London before he left for overseas service. He is a lieutenant in the Royal Air Force."

"This is the special man?" Jamil asked quietly and gently.

"Yes, you could say he is my fiancé," Amanda answered, candidly.

To cover his momentary disappointment, Jamil picked up his cup and finished the small amount of coffee in the bottom. "Indeed, this is a very charming place. The atmosphere is romantic and poetic!"

"Yes, I come here at least once a month. It is my favorite place. Paul drinks, although only moderately, but that night he begged me to drink at least a single glass with him. I refused. Although drinking with him would have been a friendly way to say good-bye, I don't believe in celebrating departures as we always eventually return."

"Any idea when he will return?"

"Not before four months."

"Do you think you will get married when he returns?"

"I'm not sure. It depends on how I feel at the time. I will use these four months to test my love for him. Without his presence clouding my thoughts, I can consider my true feelings for him with clarity. Then I can honestly tell him whether my feelings are strong enough to marry him."

"Well, I think you have proven yourself to be a capable and intelligent woman, and I'm sure you will make the right decision. I wish you happiness from the bottom of my heart. I also pray that you have many beautiful children like their mother."

Jamil noticed that the young lady was not as happy for his comment as he had expected. She considered his words and then offered a little more information. "I have known Paul for a long time, since the beginning of secondary school," the young lady said with a bright smile spread over her lovely vibrant face. "He was always gentle, mild and mellow-tempered. Always generous and serious, he has the good qualities that a women desires in a husband."

“Since he possesses all those marvelous qualities, I would say marry him without hesitation,” Jamil said. “Love will come; it will emerge after you have lived together. Our fathers and our grandfathers married and fell in love afterwards.”

“Although our dating was constant, I continued to go out with other men, but never grew to favor any of them. I always missed Paul, as he respected my wishes and listened to what I told him. He never asked me for a thing I did not want to give him. But I was inclined to love him like a brother.”

“Trust me, the brotherly love is a temporary feeling,” Jamil said. “When you get married, your feelings toward him will change, and you will desire him as a normal woman desires a man with whom she is deeply in love.”

“I never desired him sexually, even when we were kissing each other. We used to exchange kisses only on his initiative. When he became aroused, I would pull away from his embrace. Although he was suffering with anguish, he never complained. Many times I desperately wished I could give him what he so badly wanted, but the mere idea used to fill me with disgust. I almost retched and gagged at the idea; it felt so foreign and strange. Am I abnormal? Am I cold? I don't know.”

“I think, Young Lady, that you read Plato's *Republic*, and were influenced by its impact,” Jamil said while hitting the table with his clenched hand. “You're giving philosophy more weight than it deserves. You are not abnormal. Nor are you cold. You have that feeling because you haven't been married in the church by a priest, and because of your pure and immaculate upbringing. Wait until you are married according to religious rituals in the way you believe it should be done!” Jamil said enthusiastically. After moistening his dry lips with his tongue, he added, “Believe me, I had the same feeling once upon a time. I wanted only to be with a certain special woman and never touch her.” Jamil was referring a time when he was an adolescent and fell in love with a girl and thought that if he married her, he wouldn't touch her.

“Paul asked me several times to marry him, but I put him off, hoping my feelings might change,” Amanda said with a frown covering her face, and a gesture of pain clouding her eyes. “I couldn't marry him honestly if I continue to feel as I do. I fear and doubt that those feelings will ever change.”

The young professor thought that the champagne had done a good job of loosening Amanda's tongue, giving her the courage to reveal her personal affairs. After all, he was still a total stranger to her.

"The night before Paul left, we had dinner in this same restaurant. After the waiter had cleared the plates from our table, Paul covered my hands with his own and gazed deeply into my eyes. I read from the serious intent in his eyes what he planned to say."

Just at that moment the little boy at another table who had dropped his plate earlier in the evening hit the couples' table with all his strength, making the items on the table dance.

"Did he do that intentionally, do you think," Jamil queried.

"Of course! I am sure he did."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because I know the couple."

Jamil had noticed that Amanda raised her hand in greeting to the mother of the child upon their entering the restaurant.

"They live a few doors from our house and his mother is a teacher. She wanted to marry her colleague, but the child didn't like his mother's suitor," Amanda said. "They always try to please him by taking him out on excursions, but to no avail."

Returning to their discussion before the interruption, she continued. "Immediately my scattered thoughts were compounded into a tight logic. As frightened as I was, I sought a way out of the coming dilemma. 'Amanda,' Paul said 'I know you don't love me as a woman loves a man, but I also know that you harbor no love for another man. It is obvious how much love I hold in my heart solely for you. You realize the importance and meaning you hold in my life. Without you, it echoes like an empty vessel and has no meaning or goal. Without you I feel lost and dead.'"

A tall, slim, well-dressed couple in their early forties following a waitress taking them to their dining table greeted Amanda by bowing their heads as they passed by. "They are our next door neighbors and are close friends to my parents," Amanda said. "They were pleased to see me back this afternoon when I went to greet them. The husband is a diplomat and the wife is a librarian who writes beautiful lyrics."

The fragrance of the woman's perfume, her subtle quiet beauty, her warm looks and charming smile, for reasons beyond Professor Dashan's comprehension, gave him a tremendous feeling of joy and happiness. Intoxicating thoughts and wild dreams filled his sentiments and made him want to fly among the clouds! Childhood

memories and dreams, naïve and simple, ran through the veins of his heart and made him want to cry.

Amanda continued to recall the words Paul had spoken to her. "'Over in the Arabian Desert, where regrettably I have to return tomorrow, an awful loneliness awaits me. But I want to go strengthened by the hope that when I return, it will be with the knowledge that you are waiting for me as my wife. Amanda! I want to marry you!' He then stopped talking."

"Believe me, my philosophic young lady, the tragic bewilderment of your friend saddens me to the core of my bones," Jamil said with severe pain clenching his heart. "I pray to the Almighty from the bottom of my heart and with all my being that when Paul returns from his mission abroad, you will be convinced and willing to accept him as a suitor and as a wedded husband."

"I pray, too," Amanda said. Jamil felt her sentence lacked sincerity and enthusiasm. "I have been entertaining that hope for a long time, but to no avail." She spoke with a low spirit and broken heart.

"Never be driven to despair nor despond of God's mercy. Your problem is neither incurable nor impossible," Jamil said. "Back home hundreds of people get married every day without love and sometimes without even knowing each other. They fall in love after they are married and have children."

"What people accept over there, they do not here," she said.

"Human beings are the same all over the world," he said.

"Despite expecting Paul to say this, I was struck dumb, confused as to what would be an adequate reply," Amanda continued. "All he had said was true. I did love him, but there was an important condition to the love. And it was this which would hurt him most. I said, 'Paul you are familiar with my opinion of marriage without love. We have talked a great deal about it. It is licensed prostitution. It is undignifying to a human being and shows disrespect to human values. It is like spitting at the face of virtue. It is insulting to the Creator Himself. You know I love you as a dear brother, but not romantically.'"

"Sorry to say this, young lady. I think you are exaggerating the case," Jamil said, trying to be polite and respectful. "Once again I say that love comes with association, with social familiarity, with being together, helping one another, sharing interesting things and experiencing a new aspect of life together. It is not only romance and love making."

“I don’t know. Maybe you are right,” she said. “Anyhow, I said, ‘I am in love with nobody now. Yet it is possible that I could fall in love tomorrow, or any other day, with another man even if I were your wife. What could you expect me to do in such a situation? In my opinion the body is sacred like the soul, and should not be sacrificed except to the person we love. The reason that I did not offer you my body despite your wanting me was not because we weren’t married in front of a priest, but because it is against my belief. Love is both a contract and a priest. I would have surrendered my body even if we weren’t married in front of a priest, if only I had loved you.’”

“That was exactly my conviction the years I was madly in platonic love with Samiha’s soul and spirit, who until this very moment does not know I even existed,” Jamil thought to himself. “Throughout those years I was practicing the platonic life of Plato’s Republic.”

"Paul never drank much, but that night he drank heavily. Then he burst into tears. I had never seen a man cry except on the movie screen. Paul gasped for breath between his sobs. He broke my heart and I felt miserable. I imagined him as my own baby drowning in front of me. I knew that with one word I could rescue him, but I could not bring myself to say it. He wept for more than two minutes, then dried his tears and said, ‘I read that in the Middle East there is marriage between strangers. The first time the couples are introduced to each other is on their marriage night. But after the ceremony, they discover love and are capable of opening their hearts to one another. I promise you that I'll never touch your body unless you fall in love with me. The seed of your love is already being nurtured in your heart as you admit loving me like a brother. But perhaps one day the seeds will sprout into true love.’”

“Oh, my God! What a dreadful and horrifying thing. It is awful,” Jamil said with burning emotions. “Help me, God, I feel about to smother. Your uncertainty and perplexity puzzle and amaze me. They are spectacular.” Jamil felt as if somebody were putting a hand over his mouth wanting to smother him. He closed his eyes and gnashed his teeth, clenching his fist bitterly as if he were trying to avoid the heartbreaking picture that the girl described to him. But she was not finished.

“We will live like husband and wife but will sleep in separate beds. And I promise you that with this situation I will be contented. I just want to be with you, close to you, experience life with you, protect you and make you happy. And if you

were to fall in love with another man while we are married, I promise to leave you and not hinder you in your new love.”

“How elegant and great that man is! Indeed, he is an angel. How much I would love to meet that legendary man. He is a rare human being. I have heard all my life about men who practice self-denial, but never such a man as yours,” Jamil said with an amazed look on his face. “As Paul said, I have met and known many married couples who never spoke to each other nor saw their spouses before the marriage night. They have been happily married for years and years and have a good number of children.”

“I know Paul very well and I know he is true to what he says. He would fulfill his promise. But the idea doesn’t appeal to me. I know that if I fall in love with someone else during our marriage, it would destroy him and be a greater catastrophe than a refusal from the very beginning.”

“I do not think you would ever fall in love with another man due to your upbringing if you consent to marry Paul. There is no doubt, Lady Hamilton, that you are an elegant, wonderful and rare woman. Your upbringing is unique, unequaled; you are very sincere and will be faithful to the man you accept in marriage. I bow myself respectfully and admiringly to your ethics and high morals.” Here Jamil stood, bowed his body, sat down and added, “Women of your caliber and ethics are not to be found nowadays to say nothing of your beauty, charm, education, personality, and elegance.”

“Thank you, Professor Dahshan. I am happy and proud that you think of me that way,” she said, also bowing. But she did not stand as he had done. Jamil started to make a casual remark but stopped as he noticed the quizzical look on her face as she studied her watch. She looked up. “Why, it’s 10:30 already. How quickly our time has gone, and I had so much planned. We still could take a cab and drive or walk about town.”

“Would you mind if we walked a bit?” Jamil interrupted. “The night is still tender and the fragrance of its charm and beauty is intoxicating me.”

“I don't know whether you are prepared for it, but I have always thought it would be pleasant to stroll around London on a summer evening,” Amanda said.

After the two acquaintances had walked awhile, they stopped a cab. "Trafalgar Square, please!" Amanda gently instructed the cabby. It was only a few moments before they alighted at Nelson's Column and advanced down Whitehall. Jamil's intelligent and sophisticated guide pointed out all the famous buildings. As they stood before the House of Parliament, the great, vibrant tones of Big Ben striking eleven o'clock thrilled Jamil. Shiver after shiver chased down his spine and through his soul with each magnificent tone! He realized as they viewed Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace that it would be compulsory to return in daylight hours. Piccadilly Circus was a hub of activity with Eros holding sway at the center.

"Let's find a cab and go to the Tower of London and past St. Paul's. I wish you could see all these beautiful places in the dazzling sunlight," Amanda said.

"I feel we have seen and walked enough for one night. I must come back, as you suggested, and see London again during the day." After chuckling, Jamil added, "Would my angelic guide be kind enough to grant me another tour?" He expected her to smile and agree, or excuse herself for not being available, but she said nothing. How eminently steadfast she looked. Her proud majestic bearing radiated a calming presence. He was impressed by her reserved dignity.

"Would you settle for a drink in a night club?" He urged.

"Marvelous! I feel in the mood for a beer. I am extremely thirsty, but no hard alcohol, remember? Oh, there is a cab now."

The delightful young lady sat back in her corner of the cab, half turned toward Jamil, silent and relaxed, her eyes closed. One arm was curved up on the back of the seat. In this position her unbuttoned coat allowed an exciting drape of the filmy fabric to hang about her breasts. Her head rested back slightly and her white neck invited caressing hands. Already Jamil was imagining that his were running over the smoothness and down her gracefully sloping shoulders, the soft neckline of chiffon falling in draped folds before his eager hands. He had taken the cue from her and was resting in silence, watching her. Now his eyes needed not to veil their desire as they devoured her hungrily. How exciting she would be in a satin gown standing innocently and demurely before him, barely submitting to his hands as they moved slowly and invitingly downward over her curves.

"Professor Dahshan, we are here. Did you rest too? I feel all new and refreshed," she said happily as the doorman helped her out.

As they entered the nightclub the floor show had just ended, and a waltz started up as the second number. Jamil suggested they make a try at it. Her young body was supple, and her quick response to his lead amazed him. She was in his strong arms like a bouquet of holy beams that he could form and adjust the way he wished.

"You danced divinely, Sir," the young lady quipped. "In your arms I felt that I had ascended to the heavens and circled into the air, hovering around and about until I reached the clouds and swam among their soft and luminary folds with each crescendo and decrescendo."

"I just wanted you to see the difference my being sober makes," Jamil said, referring to the evening that the two of them had spent together at the Hollywood nightclub.

As they laughed, she came in closer, and he found himself fighting to restrain the impulse to press her to his body until she would become a part of him. Even the thought of it evoked excitement in his loins. They sat long over their last drink. They told each other they had enjoyed their time together and so said their good-night not knowing whether it was good-bye or not. Jamil, at least, was sure it was not if he could help it.

"Professor Dahshan! Pardon me for my naive and uncultivated questions, but I am very interested in your opinion. In spite of your young age, I believe you are a very cultured, worldly-wise individual with much to offer. You have endured many experiences in life, and I believe you have developed a strong and deep knowledge of the world as a result."

"Miss Hamilton! I thank you for such a wonderful compliment from such a beautiful and intelligent woman, but I'm very curious...What is your question?"

"How do individuals know when they are experiencing real love? How do you think it feels right before you fall in love?"

Jamil searched for a reply that would serve as balm for her anguish, but Allah was not forthcoming, so he remained silent. He broke the uncomfortable silence after glancing at his watch and noticing it was a little after 1:00 a.m. "Wow! We have been in here for over two hours, lost in this wonderful conversation."

"I have been to many different nightclubs, but I have never had the pleasure and enjoyment which I've had tonight," Amanda said with a huge grin. She glanced around; most of the tables were vacant. "People are either on their way home or

moving on to other clubs, I suppose.” Twisting in her seat, making a move to stand, she said, "Get ready. When I come back from the powder room, we will dance!"

“Again?”

“Yes, again! Are you tired?”

“Of course not! I was afraid you were!”

“No, I am not tired at all. I want to keep dancing until the sun rises! Can you keep up with me?”

Despite the fact that Jamil was a dancing tyro, having learned the skill after going to America, that night he felt himself to be the best dancer in Europe and both American continents. He forgot himself and the world around him while he danced. He most enjoyed the waltz, and that is what he now danced with Amanda as she rested her cheek gently against his chest. He felt their warm breaths intermingle in a lover's knot. The world was his to command, and he imagined himself to be the catalyst for the collapse of the colonial British Empire, as if he were the master of Mr. Balfour, who gave his country, Palestine, as a present to Israel. Dancing with this English girl in England was a slap in the face for the colonialism that imprisoned his native country.

Amanda, the English coquette, pulled back from his chest and looked dreamily into his eyes, saying, "My girlfriend Anne has told me many times that I am cold and not very appealing to men."

"She doesn't know what she is talking about. You are the warmest and most compassionate woman I have ever met." Jamil said in the style of Casanova, embracing her tightly to himself, as if he wanted to melt and sink into her body.

From the bandstand the conductor said over the microphone, "My apologies, everyone, this will be the last dance of the night." The music started and a petite, young female singer, her voice barely rising above a whisper, crooned into the microphone, gently filling the room with a new song. Every single person in the club had left his table and was now on the dance floor, such was the power of the singer. Her sonorous notes hung in the air with a latent promise, and Jamil felt her words as an ethereal presence, brushing like a feather against his cheek.

*When the lights are low,
The music gathers passionate force
And the lovers are embracing.
I rest my head on your shoulder,*

*And I start to dream, but you,
You close your eyes and kiss me
Then withdraw, leaving me to dance alone,
Dancing and dreaming
Until my body melts into the resonance
Of vanished notes that hang
In the air like a mist of memory.
I know you will leave me and go
I know she is waiting for you
Over there. Far away
Because she found you before I did
And she is more worthy of your love.
But I endowed you with my heart, my being,
So let me melt a harmony and now echo empty.
Pervade long and quick
And I will vanish because
My life is meaningless without you.
My life is meaningless without you.
Meaningless! Meaningless!*

Amanda suddenly burst into tears, attracting the attention of all the dancers on the floor. This saddened Jamil endlessly, for he had no idea what could have upset her so tremendously. Whisking her away from the press of people, Amanda's new Prince Charming did not stop dancing until they reached the edge of the dance floor where she could recompose herself in the safety of his company alone. Then he quickly led the sobbing young lady to the door and ushered her from the restaurant. Upon exiting the club, he hailed the nearest cab, paid for his services and wished her a good night!

As Jamil watched, the cab pulled this wonderfully charming and intriguing young lady farther and farther from his presence. He began to feel a most unusual urge to walk and just keep walking. He roamed the streets of London aimlessly like a stray dog until he became spiritually, physically and emotionally exhausted. Subconsciously he decided to return to his hotel room after what seemed to be years, but was really only a few minutes after five o'clock in the morning.

Then he began to reminisce, remembering what it would be like at home around this time. Aminah, his mother, would be awakening. Jamil, his brother and sisters would be doing their ablutions in order to prepare for their morning prayer together! “Oh, what a wonderful time this was together!” Such a simple moment in time had become one of his most treasured memories of life back home. The highly spirited young man had joined his family for morning prayers as a young adult. But after leaving for America, he had never prayed, not even one single time, and he was afraid. He had never again faced his heart back to Mecca, and he felt horribly sad and awfully depressed.

Chapter 3

Jamil had never touched a drop of alcohol before setting foot on foreign soil. After experiencing the effects of it on shipboard after leaving his native land, the young professor never touched alcohol again until the day he uncovered a deception that shattered his strong sense of propriety. His mind and senses were struggling to keep afloat among his jerky agitated thoughts. He had driven aimlessly for hours, little realizing what he was doing, the events of the afternoon haunting him. Unable to banish them, he was driving himself to exhaustion, starving his mind of the energy that his ill thoughts fed upon. That he should catch the wife of a true friend, no, his best friend in America, cheating behind her husband's back! It was beyond comprehension!

The anger, frustration and blind fury of that event burned his eyes as they became choked with tears. Several times Jamil had to pull the car over, unable to focus on the road. Nearing the point of exhaustion, he no longer had the energy to think of the situation. For the past few hours he had been unconscious of anything around him.

Finally his mind unshackled itself from the burden of his discovery, and he found himself in the heart of Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard. He recognized the street as being close to an Arab night-club which Jamil had first entered on the invitation of his friend, Dr. Bruce Sheppard and his wife, Janet, to celebrate his 28th birthday. It was Janet whom he had caught cheating on Bruce.

As much anger and frustration as he felt, the nightclub offered him some kind of sanctuary, for his exhaustion was now complete. Looking at his watch, he whistled in surprise. He had been driving aimlessly for three full hours and had lost all sense of the passage of time. It was still early and the club contained only a small number of people. Neither the live band nor the dancers had arrived. The waitresses were using this quiet period to distribute and ply their customers with drink.

Taped Arabic music issued from a stereo system. He listened to the words of Fauruz, one of the greatest Arabic female singers, as her lilting voice permeated the club. He instinctively recognized two songs: "We surely will return to our stolen homes one day, no matter however long it shall take" and "There is no need to open the door, Mother; you will find no one there... because all the real men have died and been buried!"

“Yes, Fauruz, you are absolutely right! All the patriotic, truthful Arab men who love their country and are willing to die for its safety and prosperity are dead and buried. Only the opportunists and traitors are still living, while they enjoy looting her wealth and prostituting her pride and dignity!” the exhausted man addressed himself. The meanings of the sorrowful words of those two sentimental national songs poured more fuel on his already burning emotions. It reminded him of his torn, bleeding homeland where his people had been massacred like contaminated chickens!

The young man made his way to the bar, and finding a stool he ordered a whiskey on the rocks. Throwing his head back, he almost casually drained the full glass, then punctuated the act by returning it heavily to the bar, leaving the ice skipping inside. He ordered another and finished it rapidly. The third glass he left sitting before him, preferring to play mindlessly with its rim and stare into the full glass.

He was pulled from his misery with the sense of being watched, that human capability of realizing when a stranger has marked you out for special attention. With his eyes aching and red, Jamil turned his head and for the first time was aware of the couple beside him. A woman and man were sitting against a wall at the end of the bar. Their laughter entered his fatigued consciousness, but it was not they who had been watching him.

To his left were two young women sitting at a small table close to the bar. Aware of Jamil's gaze, they turned their heads, looking guilty as if they had been caught stealing. Unabashed by their blatant appraisal of him, he stood and gave a slight bow with his drink held before him. They giggled conspiratorially, exchanging glances, which suggested to him that they had been watching him from the moment he had entered the club. To be frank, his wild entrance and rapid consumption of whiskey had not been civilized, and he could only improve on his present image.

So he presented his glass to the two girls, acknowledging them, and said, "I drink a toast to the two most beautiful women in Hollywood." Taking a small sip, he placed the glass onto the bar. The exhaustion and influence of the whiskey had clouded his vision, and he was unable to stop staring fixedly at the two girl's breasts, which had been set in delightful motion by their laughter. This scene fired Jamil with the inspiration to approach the girls. With a courtly bow he said, "Would two such charming ladies acquiesce to my desire by allowing me to sit with them, an honor that would give me unaccountable delight?"

Without waiting for a response, the intruder pulled a chair to their table and sat. He realized with shame, he had not even offered the two a drink. Standing again in mock gallantry and knocking his chair backwards, he said, "To my shame, I have imposed my company on you both, my sweet ladies, without even offering to buy you a drink." Both girls thanked him, then apologized by saying both their glasses were full of tonic water, and neither of them drank alcohol. He stood in surprise. "Is it possible that two Athenian goddesses brought up among the famous vineyards of Olympus, and sisters to Bacchus, do not drink! And In Hollywood too," he added, slyly. "Or is it possible that you are two Muslim girls from my struggling and immortal home town, Salt?" he said with a childish giggle!

The two girls sat in stony silence. Perhaps they had not understood him. "Ah, how stupid of me!" He hit his forehead with a cupped hand. "I drag you into a long conversation before even introducing myself. My name is Jamil Dahshan. I am a professor at California University in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies. I am my university's chosen representative at an Islamic Conference to be held in London in a few days--London, the capital and sanctuary of our former colonial patrons who now kowtow to our new masters made of money, wealth and dirt, and who feel obligated to continue the burden of helping us rule our own country." He wiped his brow and rested for a moment before continuing.

"I am not an American, and I do not yet have the honor of being bred into the bloodline of the most powerful, the most advanced, the richest, the most generous towards poor nations--but, alas! one that is hated for her sickening bias to Israel." He paused momentarily, but then resumed, "I am originally from the '*assamedah*' city of Salt, the impervious, everlasting and gracefully resisting Salt. I left it four years ago. It is where my mother, sisters, and brothers still live." Jamil paused. The effect of his drinking had finally mastered his mind and tongue, rendering him almost incapable of speech. After a short rest he managed to continue, "Have I said everything about myself? I am now ready to receive questions from these two loveliest of ladies."

"Where is this Salt?" One of the girls asked. "I am baffled! Salt Lake City is in the state of Utah. We visited it only last week. But you are not a son of America?"

Jamil laughed moronically, lengthening the laugh painfully beyond sober limits. "My Salt '*assamedah*' is beyond the seas, and oceans. It is the second city in the majestic Hashemite Empire. It would have been the capital, were it not for the

stupidity, ignorance and backwardness of its people! *Ma fi much*. They have no brain. He tapped his head several times for emphasis.

Since there was no country of that name, the two girls asked unanimously, "Where is the Hashemite Empire located?"

"She is in the Middle East. Her name is Jordan, and I christened her this name because of my love for her." After a moment's thought he added, "It is the sole country in the entire world that scares and frightens Israel!" He finished with a flourish and slapped his hand on the table for emphasis.

The two girls laughed and said in unison, "The country of King Hussein!"

"Yes, bless your hearts, and God grant you a long life! She is the country of King Hussein. How great and beautiful for a country to be known by the name of its ruler. Ah, it's different here. Our rulers endow the countries they rule with their names, because they are farms which they have inherited from their fathers. King Saud named Hijaz and Najd after his family's name as if it were a stockyard of cattle willed to him by his father."

The down hearted fellow lifted his glass ponderously to drink from it, but one of the girls rose from her chair and reaching for his glass said with utmost politeness and compassion, "Would you allow me, Sir, to take this glass?"

"Shame on me! I have been shamed! Have dignity, gallantry and chivalry vanished from this world? A goddess like you will drink what is left over from my glass? I ask God's forgiveness." He looked about trying to find the waitress to order two more drinks for the girls.

"We don't drink alcohol, Sir. It has a strong effect on us. I just like to enjoy contemplating the sight of a glass of whiskey." This obvious excuse was not recognized by Jamil who remained befuddled. "Of course, of course, with great pleasure, take it." He rose respectfully, bent his head and handed the glass to her outstretched hand. She took the glass and placed it before her. When a waitress passed by with a tray of empty glasses, she placed Jamil's glass with them.

The sad professor remained silent; he stared at her with a thankful appreciation. He admired her concern and kind act. There was a short lapse, but he was unaware of it before asking, "You haven't mentioned to me your names or where you are from."

"We're so sorry; we were carried away by the conversation." The girl who took the glass motioned to her friend. "This is my girlfriend Elizabeth Smith, and I am

Amanda Hamilton. We are from London. We are both on a four week tour of America."

"You mean London in the British Empire, the colonial capital of the world?" Jamil asked, amazed at the irony of the situation, but with excitement in his voice.

"Yes, London. But it is the capital of the United Kingdom. There is no longer anything that goes by the name of the British Empire. It is finished."

"*Addayim wajih* Allah."

"What does that mean, Sir?"

"It means only God's face is everlasting."

The two girls laughed. They said, "Yes, the British Empire is finished and '*annyim wajih* Allah'".

Jamil laughed enthusiastically with delight because of their mispronunciation. The two girls exchanged questioning looks. "I said '*addayim*', but you said '*annayim*' which means 'the face of God is sleeping.'" The girls joined his laughter with great enthusiasm.

"By the way," Jamil said, "What would you young ladies think if the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, called the United Kingdom the United Kingdom of Thatcher?" The joke hit home, and the three laughed together.

"I usually don't drink alcohol, the only exception being when I wish to be sociable. Even then I drink very little--only a glass of beer." The two girls' silence encouraged Jamil to continue, and his eyes flickered between the two, seeking silent permission and willingness to hear and bear his secret.

"This afternoon I saw the wife of my dearest and best friend in America in the arms of another man, our colleague at the University. They were...." Jamil's sentence stuck in his throat. His head fell between his hands on the table. He had no idea how much time had passed before he saw some young women dancing to a live band, the club having swung into action, the crowd having swelled somewhat surprisingly, for the singer left much to be desired. He rose with great difficulty and asked Elizabeth to dance, bowing his head in respect. Elizabeth politely passed the invitation on to Amanda, who readily accepted!

Jamil did not dance with her as would have been expected. Instead he wrapped his arms passionately around her, pulling her close, far too familiarly for passing strangers. But his intoxicated state provided him with a strength and assurance, and his actions proclaimed loudly his loving physical attentions. The girl pushed him

away and said angrily, "This is not what a real gentleman does when he dances with a respectable lady."

Jamil was shamed by his actions and apologized whole-heartedly for his behavior. Then he held her as a respectable man would hold a girl if he is to dance with her. He attempted a few steps and a single turn, and then found the motion had a bad effect on his already distorted sense of balance. So he politely asked to rest for awhile, and they returned to the place where they had been sitting.

The drunken chap's encounter with the whiskey had disabled his senses. His condition did not bode well for conversation, and he had forfeited control of his body to the alcohol. It was a demanding mistress and completely manipulated his body. He even had trouble keeping his eyes open. Aware of the young man's predicament, the two girls pretended to be unaware of his state and carried out a loud conversation between them and diverted their attention to the singer and the crush of people around them. The mass of dancers hung like wavering ghosts before Jamil's unfocused vision.

He had a vague memory of being encouraged by a waitress to purchase more drinks. With his tongue paralyzed and stuck to the floor of his mouth, he was unable to even utter, "No thanks." Amanda thankfully intervened for him, and turning to the waitress, politely refused the offer. The waitress remained steadfast and overlooked the reply, suggesting that if they did not care to drink, then it would be best if they vacated their table to make room for other customers.

Amanda's friend, Elizabeth, irritated by the request, said, "But I don't see any customers standing and many of the chairs are empty."

"We expect that customers watching the show will continue to order drinks; otherwise they are invited to make room for new customers. It is club policy." The waitress was brusque in her reply which was intended to kill further argument.

"Can we pay the price of three drinks to continue sitting here? We don't actually need them."

"No. I have to bring them to you."

"Well then! Bring us three tonic waters."

For two non-drinkers, the club's policy was both stressful and irritating. Throughout the entire conversation, Jamil continued to exist in a semi-conscious state. He wished to participate, and indeed the words were tossing about in his head, but to no avail. His tongue was of pathetic little use; it had curled up and died in his mouth.

When the waitress returned, Miss Hamilton checked the bill, then reached into her purse for some money. Somewhere deep in his alcoholic stupor, a light flickered. Jamil's deep masculine sense of pride and propriety dissipated the alcoholic fog. Adrenaline coursed through his body, and he was transformed from a shambling wreck to a super charged crusader of good etiquette. His tongue came to life, and with his eyes flaring, he spoke. "No, by Allah the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth! I shall pay! You are my guest!" He trapped Amanda's hand on the table as she reached to pay the waitress.

Leaping from his chair, he reached into his back pocket, and like a magician performing his finest trick, he majestically whipped a twenty dollar bill from his wallet, slapped it on the table and said with overwhelming extravagance, "Keep the change!" His eyes gleamed in regal satisfaction until he looked at the diminished contents of his wallet, which after paying for the drinks contained only two five-dollar bills and three one-dollar bills.

The following day Jamil was to open his wallet and find the five and one dollar bills still there, but to his absolute amazement he also found the twenty dollar bill which he had used to pay for the drinks. How had that come to be in his wallet? Had Amanda, without attracting his attention, slipped in a new twenty-dollar bill? It remained a mystery.

"Professor Dahshan! Could you give us the telephone number of a friend? Perhaps he or she could entertain you. We don't want to leave you here, but we must go," Miss Hamilton said with the utmost kindness and compassion.

"Don't worry. I can keep myself entertained; you go. Thank you very much for everything and God bless you both. I will never forget you." Before he finished his sentence, he heard a charming feminine voice talking to him in Arabic, his beloved native language!

"*MarHaba Ustaz* Dahshan. How nice to see you here!" This was followed by a man's voice full of enthusiasm and eagerness,

"*Kaif Halak Ustaz* Jamil?" Jamil partly drew back his heavy eyelids, stood and nodded in greeting; a smile spreading over his face.

"Do you know him?" Miss Hamilton asked, her eyes flooding with relief.

"Of course!" they replied in unison. "He is our professor and dear friend."

"Thank God," said Amanda, "I feel released now."

The other girl continued, "We were worried about leaving him in this condition."

"Are you his girlfriend?" the newcomer asked Amanda.

"No," she answered smiling, looking at her watch. "We met about three hours ago. He seems very unhappy." After throwing a look at Jamil she added, "I'm very sorry we have to leave."

Jamil, upon seeing two of his Arabic students, was reminded of the cause for his present condition. Silent tears fell, and his heart was once again wracked in grief. He didn't remember whether he had actually exchanged a handshake with the two English girls or whether he'd remained seated, but he had a clear memory of Amanda, for just as she turned, he glimpsed wet tears being squeezed out from the corner of her angelic eyes.

Jamil could swear by the Almighty God that he had seen tears like these before, as well as the girl who had shed them, but when? Where? He wished he could remember, but the damned alcohol made him exhausted physically and emotionally, so that he could not think straight.

"Go Mustafa, bring my handbag and tell Judy and Adnan to come over and we'll sit with *Ustaz* Dahshan." After speaking this to her fiancé, Salma sat in Amanda's vacant chair. Her future husband disappeared into the milling crowd in search of the other two. The girl, slightly tipsy, babbled enthusiastically if incoherently to Jamil, "Today is my birthday and I was invited here by Mustafa to celebrate. He also invited Adnan and his girlfriend along. We ate *Shishkabbab*, *Kibbeh*, rice and many other Arab goodies. It was a wonderful time. After dinner Adnan invited us to a bar where I had my first legal beer. I'm 21 today." She giggled convulsively.

"I'm so happy now because I am twenty-one. My parents promised we could write our *kitaabi* marriage contract when I turned twenty-one and we can marry when we graduate. We have only one year to wait. Next Sunday we will have the *Sheik* in our house and then we will write our *kitaabi*. So be warned, you're invited from this moment. Remember, you promised us three months ago that you would attend. If you don't, Mustafa and I will both be cross with you." The girl spattered her conversation with both English and Arabic words. Occasionally she paused to shrug her shoulders or punctuate a remark with a nervous giggle. All this time Jamil remained silent, watching and listening to her with wide eyes. Soon the other three

joined them and Adnan extended a familiar hand to Jamil, and then introduced his girlfriend Judy.

Salma Karum and Mustafa Salamah had been Jamil's students last semester. It was in his class that they had met and fallen in love. Professor Dahshan liked and respected his two students because both of them were diligent, generous and well cultivated. Every time they had a problem or disagreement, emotional or social, regardless of its size, they rushed to him and asked his advice and guidance, and they always accepted his opinion.

Both were Palestinians. Salma's grandparents were from the 1948 exodus from a village near Jaffa. They arrived as humble immigrants to America, but Salma's parents were born and married in Los Angeles. Salma, their only daughter, was born there. Mustafa's parents were from the 1967 exodus. They too were from a village beside Jerusalem, but Mustafa was born in Amman, Jordan. His parents had sent him to the States to study. Here he met Salma. The two were soon in love. After being introduced to Salma's parents, Mustafa was given permission to marry their daughter. He had obviously made a good impression on her parents, as he was now working for her father at the service station to support himself in college.

Although Professor Jamil Dahshan had assured his two students and their friends that he was in full control of his mental faculties and could easily drive home with no danger of having an accident, Salma insisted vehemently that he should not drive. She said her fiancé would drive professor Dahshan's car and she would ride with him while their two friends would follow in Mustafa's car.

"Sweetheart," Mustafa said. "*Ustaz* Dahshan says he can drive all right. Don't you think we are making a big deal out of nothing by insisting on driving him home?"

"Mustafa, for heaven's sake, don't argue with me. Do as I tell you, please!" Salma hissed at her fiancé.

"Ok! Ok! Sweetheart!" Mustafa answered, gesturing with his hand to calm her down. "But I have the feeling he wants to be left alone!"

"I don't want any and's, if's or but's. Just come with me," Salma persisted.

"Any woman who hasn't your force of character should bury herself alive," Professor Dahshan said feebly. "If our country had a good number of women like you, we would not have lost Palestine!" Salma did not comment, but Jamil was sure that she had heard and understood what he meant because her face brightened and her eyes shone.

Although professor Dahshan claimed to be fine, he was unable to give Mustafa directions to his apartment. He could tell him only the address, forcing the latter to rely on a map. "I am very sorry, *Habeebati* Sweetheart," Jamil heard Mustafa say to Salma. "You are always right. What would have happened if I hadn't listened to your advice and left *Ustaz* Dahshan to drive himself home? Tragedy!" Salma did not comment.

"Thank you very much. I appreciate it a great deal," Jamil said to them after they arrived at his house. "Now, you must come up so we all can have something. I insist."

"Not now, thank you very much. Maybe some other time. It is getting late, and Salma's parents will worry!" Mustafa said.

"Yes, *Ustaz*, we will go up with you," Salma said, and then looked at Adnan and his girlfriend. "Wait for us; we will be back shortly." Mustafa did not object this time, but followed his fiancé who caught Jamil's hand and headed toward the gate of the building.

Jamil feebly tried to convince Adnan and his girl friend to join them, but Salma said that the four of them would come in the near future since now that they knew where he lived.

"Please, Sweetheart." Salma said after the three of them were inside the apartment, "let us help *Ustaz* Dahshan change his clothes and put him to bed."

"Salma! Tell your parents that they have given birth to another Cleopatra!" Professor Dahshan's weak voice reached her ears from his bed. Again the young lady did not comment! The couple turned off the lights, closed the door behind them, and started down the stairs.

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Chapter 4

A few minutes after Salma and Mustafa's departure, the telephone rang. It continued ringing until Jamil was able to reach for the receiver and sleepily say, "Hello."

"Hey man! Where have you been all this time?" Dr. Bruce Sheppard asked anxiously. "I have been phoning you since two o'clock this afternoon. I want..." Dr. Sheppard was unable to finish his sentence because Professor Dahshan could not control his emotions and burst-out crying hysterically, the receiver falling from his hand after hearing his friend's voice.

Dr. Sheppard's voice kept roaring through the receiver. "Hello! Hello! Jamil! Are you there? Tell me what is wrong!" When he could not get an answer, he hung up the telephone and left his house in a hurry, heading to professor Dahshan's apartment.

"You scared the hell out of us," Dr. Sheppard said as soon as he entered Jamil's bedroom and saw what had happened. "What happened to you? Have you heard bad news from home? Speak up. Why aren't you talking? Please tell us. We are extremely worried."

Hearing his friend's condolences, Jamil's bleeding wounds opened anew and the rhythm of his sobbing increased. After much questioning and arguing, Jamil was able to say, "I suddenly felt homesick... awfully home sick. I thought of my mother, sisters and brothers. I missed them terribly. I felt I was about to die from grief. I was afraid of losing my mind. I went to Hollywood to the Arab Club to which you introduced me, and I got drunk."

Dr. Sheppard chuckled, shook his head and then said, "Thank God. You really scared us. Poor Jeanette was shaking like a leaf in a strong wind worrying about you. We thought something tragic had occurred, not just foolish homesickness!"

"Homesickness is not an easy thing, Dear," his Mrs. Sheppard said with her trembling body and shivering voice. "Jamil is a very sentimental person. He told me that it has to do with his childhood and upbringing." When neither of the two men said anything, she continued; "Thank God you were able to drive home safely."

"Yes, Jamil. You should have telephoned us to come and get you. It was a big mistake to drive. You could easily have had an accident and been killed," Mr. Sheppard said sincerely.

"I was not able to drive," Jamil said weakly. "One of my Arab students was there and drove me home."

"Thank God for that!" they said, interrupting each other.

"I bet you haven't eaten anything all day," Dr. Sheppard said.

When they heard no answer, the wife said, "I will see what he has in the refrigerator or open a can of something."

"No Dear; don't bother. You stay with Jamil," the husband said. "I will run out and get a pizza. I myself feel a little bit hungry."

"That's an excellent idea honey! Bring the largest size, the supreme. I haven't had anything all day except coffee."

"Do you think the Pizza Place in the Village is still open?" asked Dr. Sheppard. It is ten past eleven,"

"Don't go to the one in the village. I like the one on Figuero Street. It is better, and I am sure it's open late, perhaps until three in the morning."

"Thank you, Jamil. You are really a true friend." Mrs. Sheppard said after she heard the outside door close. "I feel awful about causing you all this pain and suffering! You could have died because of me." Jamil was silent and his eyes were closed. "I knew you to be an ethical person and a generous friend. But I had not realized that your friendship with us would cause you unhappiness and pain. I am so sorry. I really am."

When Jamil said nothing, she spoke angrily. "Why don't you talk to me, Jamil? Do you want to crucify me? I told you I was very, very sorry, and nothing has happened between Dr. Faruk and me. I swear to you that since I started dating Bruce five years ago, I have never cheated on him!"

"Cheating on one's spouse is not only sleeping with or kissing another person," Jamil said. "In my opinion, the mere thought of cheating is really cheating!"

"How lucky is the woman you are going to marry! She will live in peace, security, and tranquility."

"I have told you and all my friends that I am incapable of loving any woman, and I will never marry. I will never commit myself."

"Men always say that. But when the right girl shows up and Cupid sends an arrow into your heart, you'll raise up your hands and surrender." Jeanette chuckled and then added, "That's what happened to Bruce."

"Not me!" Jamil shook his head and smiled.

"Wait and see. Believe me, Jamil, nothing has happened between Dr. Faruk and me. He only kissed me, but I didn't respond. As a matter of fact, I shoved him away."

Jamil did not utter a single word, but he thought to himself, "Maybe you pushed him away at the beginning, but in the end you would respond, since you accepted his invitation in the beginning."

"I don't know how it happened! I must have lost my mind to agree to accept his invitation to see him alone, but he was very persistent." When Jamil said nothing, she was convinced that there was no hope of his talking so she went on. "Since he arrived in America a year ago and we had a reception party for him, he has flirted with me, even before Bruce and I were married. I always ignored his flirtations, but he never gave up. Every time we were alone or even a few steps away from other people, he had many praises about my beauty or charm or how lucky Bruce was to have me! He also wished that I were his sweetheart. I always stopped him."

"I am sure you were delighted he was chasing you. Just like a typical female, you like it when a man shows interest in you," Jamil finally said without opening his eyes.

"I have heard many men praise my beauty and parts of my body all my life, but it has never bothered me," she said.

"Mrs. Sheppard!" Jamil said opening his eyes, "the woman is like a fresh flower and we men are like bees buzzing around her."

She burst out laughing and said, "Even your metaphors are witty, ingenious and sharp. Why are you calling me Mrs. Sheppard and not Jeannette like you usually do?"

"I was really shocked. I couldn't believe my eyes! I thought you and Bruce were deeply in love," Jamil said.

"Yes, we are. We are! Believe me, Jamil. Since I fell in love with Bruce five years ago, I've never looked at another man."

"Dr. Faruk was not a man? Maybe he was an angel or a nymph!" Jamil said sarcastically. "I can't understand your logic, you women! You always have a ready excuse to justify your wrong actions!"

"Please Jamil! Don't hate me. I am not a bad woman. I am a faithful wife." Then, she started sobbing.

"*Domoo' attamaseeh!* Crocodile tears!" Jamil said in Arabic. "That is your weapon. You women! Tears!"

When she stopped crying, she continued explaining. "Two days ago Dr. Faruk telephoned me at work and invited me to lunch. I asked him if he meant both Bruce and me. He said he meant only me, because he wanted to see and talk to me alone. I told him I was married and loved my husband very much, and meeting him secretly was cheating, and I wouldn't cheat on my husband."

"You all say that, damn you! But you still do it!" Jamil said to himself, angrily.

"His answer was, 'Who is talking about cheating? I only want to have lunch with you.' I told him we had had many lunches and dinners together, but his answer was that there were a lot of people around, and he would like to talk with me alone!"

"Of course you believed him, because it satisfied your vanity and ego," Jamil said angrily. "Why doesn't he enjoy it when you're both with other people?"

"Anyhow, I accepted his invitation. I wanted to see what he wanted. It was out of curiosity. I know myself. No man could steal me from my husband. No one could tempt or fool me! We hadn't been together five minutes when you drove by."

"How villain of me! I was depriving you of your pleasure! You must have hated me to the bone at that moment and wished me dead!"

"Oh don't say that! As a matter of fact I was very thankful to you. After you saw us, I realized I shouldn't have come. I felt as if I had been hypnotized. When I saw you, it awakened me."

"So your conscience was finally awakened?" Jamil said with extreme anger and sarcasm.

He felt she had ignored his comment because she said, "Sometimes a man or a woman wants to tell the opposite sex about something but doesn't feel free to tell it in front of others!"

"Your reasoning and logic are peculiar, you women! When one of you cheats on her husband, she believes she has done it out of curiosity, not because she wanted to satisfy her lust and ego!"

"You are very hard on me, Jamil! You are crucifying me! You are also unfair!" she said angrily.

"But you were kissing one another. Or that was just playing?" Jamil was really provoked. "Haven't I told you, you women always justify your actions?"

"I immediately threw him out of my car and went back to work very angry at him! I came to realize that his intentions were sinister." Jamil laughed bitterly at her awkward logic.

There was a moment of silence, "I have never been in the restaurant. It looks very nice from the outside. Do you go there very often?"

"Occasionally," Jamil said. "I was planning to invite you and Bruce to dinner there. I know your birthday is next week."

"Oh ,Jamil, I feel so ashamed of myself! I wish I were dead."

"Feeling sorry for yourself won't help," Jamil said sharply. "If you learned a lesson from this, that's what counts. Did you?"

She nodded and said. "Yes, the hard way."

"Good! But don't forget it. Most sins start as temptation as in your case. But it is best to resist them before they become reality," Jamil said.

"Don't worry, Brother," Mrs. Sheppard said sincerely. "I have learned my lesson the hardest way."

"It seems we never learn anything in life without paying the price first!" Jamil said aloud to himself.

"Have you forgiven me now?" she asked smilingly.

"I am neither your husband nor God. They are the only two who have the privilege to do that."

"I know!" she said. "But as a close friend to Bruce; have you forgiven his wife?"

Before professor Dahshan could reply, the door opened and Dr. Sheppard's voice was heard. "How is Jamil now, Sweetheart?"

"I think he is a little better, but he is still in bed."

"Get up man! You scared the hell out of us. If you had seen Jeannette and the condition she was in, you would be ashamed of yourself. She was trembling and shaking like a tender branch in a severe storm. I never thought she cared for you that much!" Chuckling he added, "If I weren't sure of her faithfulness to our love and of your loyalty to me, I would have thought there was something fishy going on. To tell you the truth, Jamil, I was a little jealous!" He put the pizza on the table, placed three plates around it, and added, "Please don't get homesick again. If you do, come to our house or ask one of us to be with you if it is that hard on you".

"Yes, Love; when he gets homesick, he shouldn't be left alone," Mrs. Sheppard said. "Some people are very sentimental, and Jamil is one."

Chapter 5

Suddenly the professor remembered the girl he tried to recall when he was heavily drunk and Amanda Hamilton was leaving him that evening in the Arabic night club when he noticed tears in her eyes. Now he remembered the girl who wept and where and when he had seen her.

It had been his first visit to the capital of the kingdom of Jordan when he was fourteen years old. He was spending a week as his brother Karim's guest. Karim was to show him the charming city and take him to the cinema, something Jamil had dreamed of doing for years and years. The trip was a gift to Jamil, a reward for making his mother, brother and every other member of the family exceedingly happy by receiving distinguished grades in the academic year.

Karim was employed by the Ministry of Defense in the capital city of Amman. He was renting a room in front of the house of a Chechnyan family that had escaped religious persecution in the country of Chechnya at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution years earlier. Karim usually took the bus from his hometown of Salt to his place of work in Amman, the capital, very early every Saturday morning. He returned to Salt every Thursday afternoon to spend the weekend with his family. His mother usually provided him with food that would last for most of the week he was to be gone.

When Jamil and Karim arrived at the capital Saturday morning for their week together, they dumped the food they were carrying on a table in the corner, and Karim informed Jamil that he had to hurry, because he was afraid of getting to work late. He told Jamil that he would be back around 2:30, and they would have lunch together. After a short siesta, they could walk about the city to see the highlights. In the evening they would go to the cinema. Karim handed Jamil some coins to buy cold drinks and suggested he walk about the town while he waited, instead of staying in the room by himself for hours.

The young boy was a stranger in the capital, and he was astonished and overwhelmed by how tremendously different it was from his hometown. The asphalt streets in the capital were wide and clean. The mud streets in his hometown were very narrow and filthy.

The women in the capital were clean and well dressed, a fragrance of perfume preceding them, while the women in his hometown had pale faces, dirty clothes and a bad smell that followed them due to their association with animals. Even the business men were different in the two cities. In the capital they were wore European clothes and were clean-shaven, while in his hometown they wore shabby, local clothes accompanied by dirty unshaven beards.

The bewildered boy was amazed to see large, new houses made of beautiful carved stones and cement, and surrounded by gorgeous gardens full of roses and flowers. The houses in his hometown were small, built of dirt and mud, and surrounded by piles of soil and garbage. The people of the capital enjoyed the luxury of electricity and water piped to their homes, while the people in his hometown still used gas lanterns and brought water from the spring on their backs or hauled it with their donkeys.

Jamil found many, many luxurious places in the capital. Just seeing them filled his heart and soul with pleasure and happiness! His town was deprived of such things as squares, public gardens, cinemas, playgrounds, restaurants and hotels.

Last, but not least, the people of the capital rode cars and buses, while the people in his town rode donkeys and mules. The only motor vehicle in his home town was the old beaten bus that ran between his town and the capital, and it was out of order most of the time, forcing people to walk to the capital if they had urgent business.

In spite of the fact that less than thirty kilometers separate Jamil's hometown, Salt, from the capital, Amman, the cultural differences at that time were very great. It was like the difference between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance or a small boat and an ocean liner.

The inhabitants of Salt have descended from the same families for hundreds of years. Everyone knows everyone else. If it happens that two people meet from different sections of town and do not know one another's names, they at least recognize their faces. When one gets married, most of the inhabitants will celebrate the marriage with him. When one dies, most of the inhabitants will walk in his funeral procession and go to his house at the end of the day to console his family.

If it happens that an outsider comes to town, the inhabitants will know everything about him by the end of the day: his name, the purpose of his coming, which family he came to visit, whether he fulfilled his mission, and even what the

family cooked for him and at which butcher shop they purchased the meat for his meals, how long he will stay and what he thinks of the people of Salt.

The social structure of Salt in Jamil's childhood was very rigid, strict and peculiar. It was based on a tribal system which considered the chastity of their women to be the honor of the whole tribe. If a man talked to a woman in the street or even in front of her family and he was not her near kin, it was considered harassment, and everyone supposed that he was seeking illicit love. Often a fight leading to casualties would take place between the families of the man and the woman. The woman's family believed that the honor of the entire family had been stained, and only the shedding of blood could erase the shame and disgrace.

Life in the capital was completely the opposite. If a strange man flirted with a woman or sang her praises, he was ignored or received a smile for his kind compliment. The majority of the inhabitants of the capital were foreigners, mostly Circassians and Chechens who had fled from religious persecution during the Bolshevik Revolution. The tall, handsome men are intrepid warriors. The ravishing beauty of their women is irresistible. Their slim, sexy bodies are like foil swords; their hair is blond and silky; their eyes are blue; their faces pure and their smiles charming. The rest of the inhabitants of the capital were Syrians; Palestinians; Yemenese; Iraqis; Arnauts; Lebanese; Algerians; Moroccans; Tunisians; Indonesians; Armenians; Kurds; Turks; Bucharesteans, Europeans, who were members of their embassies; and several thousand original inhabitants, most of them from nomadic tribes.

When Jamil reached the age of seven, he, as a good and committed Muslim boy, started to fast a few days during the month of Ramadan and to perform at least the two evening prayers. When he reached the age of fourteen, he fasted the whole month and performed the five daily prayers. From the first day he started school, he received at least one hour of religious instruction. Never a day passed without hearing his teacher of religion mention Heaven and Hell to the class and the glorious life and nymphs in the first and the suffering in the second.

One day one of the students asked the teacher, "What must we do to enter Paradise and enjoy that wonderful life instead of burning in the fire of Hell?"

The teacher replied, "You must believe in God and His Prophets, the Judgment Day and the Holy Books. Also you must perform the five daily prayers, fast the month of Ramadan and pay your *zakat* tithes."

Jamil kept all those commandments.

Because it was taboo in Jamil's hometown for men and women to mingle in any aspect of life unless they were near of kin, Jamil had never had the chance to see or even talk to a woman. This caused him to long for a female companion with whom he could converse and whom he could love. When he returned in the afternoon from his walking trip in the streets of the capital and entered the main gate of the house, he saw a girl about his age sitting under a huge vine trellis, which was loaded with bunches of unripe grapes. For some reason he could not understand, he felt a joyful, heavenly feeling occupying every cell of his body, a joy he had never before experienced. He was so happy he felt could fly! He imagined that God, glorify His name, had sent him a nymph in this world.

He walked toward the girl, pushed by an unseen power, as if he were hypnotized, until he stood in front of her. He bowed respectfully and graciously. His mouth spoke as if he were reading lyric poetry without his having any control over it. "I have never seen beauty and charm as sweet as yours in my entire life. No doubt you are a nymph from Paradise. God sent you to save the souls of straying people. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

The girl remained seated, smiled and said nothing.

"You are the most beautiful girl God has ever created, no doubt!" Jamil said while he was still feeling hypnotized. You have lustrous eyes!

The girl uttered some words that he could not understand, but he felt the music of her voice and the charm of her smile creeping into his veins so he went on:

"I am Karim's brother; I came from our town to..."

Jamil was interrupted by a young boy of about nine years old, the likes of whom he had not seen before and who seemed to have come from nowhere. "She doesn't understand Arabic!" As he said that, a smile spread slowly until it brightened his entire face.

Jamil felt very embarrassed and confused. A wave of cold sweat covered him all over while the boy was laughing and talking to the girl in her language. No doubt he was translating to her what Jamil had said, because she looked at Jamil and nodded her head, granting him a charming smile.

"She says, 'Thank you very much. You are a very polite boy. Your brother is also very polite,'" the young boy said.

"Is she your sister?" Jamil asked, while he was wiping the sweat from his forehead and neck with a cloth handkerchief.

“No, she is my aunt’s daughter. Her name is Natasha. She came with her mother from Chechnya to visit us three weeks ago, and will go back this coming Wednesday.”

“What is your name, good boy?” Jamil asked with extreme respect and politeness.

“I am Mamon.”

“That is a pretty name!”

Suddenly the main gate opened and Karim entered. Jamil saw him heading toward the room and handed him his key. While Karim was opening the door, he said to Jamil, “I hope you like what you have seen. The capital is extremely different from our town.”

“Very much. I wish we could move here.”

“One of these days we will. Have you met Natasha and Mamon? They are very nice. It is too bad Natasha doesn’t speak Arabic. She is about your age. You could visit with her when I’m at work.” Jamil did not comment, but he really wished that she did speak Arabic, or that he could speak her language.

After lunch, Jamil told his brother that he did not feel he needed to take a nap. Instead he asked if he could take the magazine Karim had brought with him and sit under the vine trellis. His brother liked the idea and encouraged it by saying how cool and refreshing it was under the vine trellis.

The innocent young boy hoped that Natasha would be there, and he would be able to indulge his senses again, in her charm and beauty; but alas! he was disappointed.

He waited for three full hours, his eyes not departing from the door of the house, but she did not come out. She and Mamon and the rest of the family must have taken a midday nap, because no one came or went through the door of the house. The forlorn young boy had no watch, but he was sure that it must have been almost seven o’clock when the door finally opened and two women, one man, and Natasha and Mamon came out. One of the women must have been Natasha’s mother, because she looked very much like her, in both looks and unseen beauty.

Jamil’s heart started beating very fast and very high. He thought that it was about to escape from the cage of his ribs, and his mouth became very dry. He felt nervous and afraid! The husband and wife welcomed Jamil and wished him a pleasant stay. They told him his brother was very polite and considerate, and he even asked

their permission to bring Jamil to stay with him for a week, which made Jamil very proud of his brother. He heard them talking to Natasha and her mother, in a language he didn't recognize. No doubt they were telling them about him and his brother.

Jamil felt Natasha's eyes fall on him like a pond of pure honey, sensing that they were trying to tell him something. But he could not cross the barrier of language or the rigidity of society. When she reached the gate, her eyes were still gazing at Jamil, whose heart's beat pulsed through his eardrums.

"Are you ready? Let's go!" Karim's voice awoke Jamil from his day dreaming.

The two brothers left for the cinema first, then to a restaurant for dinner. Afterwards, Karim took Jamil to the new quarter of the city and gave him a tour of the exciting lights of the capital and its delights. It was around midnight and the moon was still shining high in the sky when they returned to Karim's room, exhausted.

As soon as the brother opened the main gate, Jamil's eyes darted unconsciously to the big house, where he saw Natasha standing behind the curtains on the second floor of the house. When she saw him, she waved, and he automatically waved back. The young Romeo's heart danced gaily and he felt very happy. He was in love now, and his sweetheart was the most beautiful girl in the whole world. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

When dawn came the next morning, Jamil was still fully awake, thinking of Natasha, the nymph from paradise and God's gift to him! The following three days-Sunday, Monday and Tuesday-were the happiest of Jamil's life. After they ate breakfast and Karim left for work, Jamil would take a magazine to the chairs under the trellis, where he would sit pretending to read and wait for his brother's return. He was, in fact, waiting to see Natasha as she went in and out of the house. Every time she passed by she granted him a smile and a reassuring nod of her head which made him exceedingly happy.

Finally Wednesday came. Around 10:00 in the morning a rented station wagon and driver was waiting in front of the house. The car would take Natasha and her mother to the Amman International Airport to board one of the Russian International Airlines which would take them to Moscow where they would take a local plane to Chechnya.

When Natasha came out and Jamil looked at her, he was shocked and perplexed. He could not believe his eyes. Her face was very pale, her eyes very

languid, and her body very weak, as if she had been sick for a year. When she saw Jamil, she started shaking as if her body was convulsing, and she burst into tears.

Both brothers, Karim and Jamil, were very sensitive, very emotional, perhaps too easily hurt due to the early death of their father. When Karim returned from work, he did not find Jamil waiting for him to have lunch together as usual. He called Mamon and asked whether he had seen his brother.

“The last time I saw him was this morning, when we took my aunt and Natasha to the airport. He was weeping and left the house in a great hurry.

“Why was he weeping? Do you know?”

“I think it was because he saw Natasha crying.”

“Why was she crying?”

“Because she had to go back to her country. She loved Amman very much and wanted to stay. My parents told her she is welcome to come back and spend every summer with us when school is out. She said that she would go to school here, but they informed her that the transition would be extremely difficult because of the language barrier. ”

It was true. When Jamil had seen Natasha leaving, he had been unable to control his emotions. He burst out crying and ran out of the main gate. He roamed the streets aimlessly like a stray dog until he was exhausted and could no longer walk. Then he sat under a tree until it got dark. Then he finally headed back and kept asking himself over and over again what had happened to him.

Why had his tears silently fallen all around him ever since leaving his brother's room? Why was his heart always so weak to environmental cause and effect? Why could he never find someone who could help him vent his sorrows? Why was he always battling this hazy emotional distress which he could not grasp but with which he was always contending? Why on earth was he like this?

His tears did not end until he entered the room where his brother Karim was waiting for him. Karim said nothing when he saw him except, “Here you are. Get ready to eat supper. Then we will go out and buy a treat. There is a new kind of dessert called ice cream. It is very delicious. I am sure you will love it.”

Before they went to bed that night, Karim said casually, “In this life, dear brother, we will surely face many unpleasant happenings. Some of them are simple, others are sad; some are complex and some so joyous you never forget them. If we kneel and surrender every time we go through unpleasant parts of life, we will not be

able to continue to live. We will die. On the other hand . . .” Karim paused for a second and then continued, “those unpleasant occurrences gives us strength, determination, and courage to face problems and grant us wisdom to deal with them.”

The unhappy boy did not comment; he only nodded his head several times, tears erupting silently; but he understood what his wise and compassionate brother was saying. Karim was always elegant, aloof, wise and prudent in tackling and dealing with his younger brother’s emotional setbacks. Unfortunately, there were just too many for him to worry about. Karim was to Jamil not only a brother, but a father and a friend.

Several months passed by and Jamil tried to forget the sad story of Natasha but to no avail. As soon as he put himself into bed, he began to weep silently but warmly. Jamil’s innocent, inexperienced and strangely immature mind could not comprehend his own naive and peculiar behavior. “What in God’s name is happening to me? Why am I weeping so feverishly?” he asked himself over and over again.

As he wept in the blanketed cave which surrounded him, he realized that his tears were not conceived through anger, frustration, or bitterness; they did not result from sadness or personal inabilities; nor did humiliation have any part in this unusual display he found himself experiencing. Rather, they were caused by boiling emotions overrun by an exceedingly joyous, childlike delight. As a result, he felt a sensual and overwhelming excitement through his whole being!

Every single night Jamil, the hermit in his blanketed cave, imagined himself seated respectfully in front of an unknown audience, a feeling of reverence and loneliness pulsing through his whole body. After all, he was in the presence and pure mind of a most beautiful and amazingly obedient woman for whom he carried great passion and respect: Natasha! He was proclaiming his love for her and pleading with her not to leave him. In return, she urged him to have patience and faith in Allah, the Almighty God, that she would come back to him one day! "Trust me. I have a deep conviction that I will return to you one day and that our bodies will unite as our souls have done."

Jamil, the boy in love, stayed bedridden for three long and agonizing weeks before his recovery. During this time he suffered fever, chills, hallucinations and listlessness. All who had the privilege of visiting him had little hope in their hearts that he would recover. Jamil’s naive and pure-hearted mother was convinced that her son was possessed by a *Jinniah*, a woman who cannot be seen by the human eye who

is usually a beautiful, young romance seeker who falls in love with handsome young men. She will haunt them, wanting to marry them even without their consent.

Aminah, his mother, thought of the *Jinniah* as a female whose parasitic nature was sucking the life and vitality from her son's ailing and weak body but offering nothing in return. She believed so strongly in the presence of this *Jinniah* that even Jamil's female visitors placed blame on the mythical 'femme fatale' for his near fatal condition. Most of his mother's female visitors agreed with Aminah, recalling similar stories from both the old and new worlds about other men and women who were possessed by their own, female or male *Jinniah* that lived off the heart and soul of their host lovers.

Despite his prognosis, Jamil managed to break free of the *Jinniah's* cursed possession. His mother thanked Allah that her son had become ill during his summer vacation and thus avoided any problems missing school because of absence. She attributed his recovery to divine intervention and to a religious *Imam* cleric whom she implored to treat her son. He carefully selected and wrote on a piece of paper some words from the Holy Quran and the Prophets that would act as powerful influences against the *Jinniah*. Jamil's mother placed this paper under Jamil's pillow. She proclaimed that had it not been for this *Imam*, her son would still be sick and suffering from the fever and hallucinations brought on by his *Jinniah's* presence.

After his recovery, the young lad began a new habit. Every night at bed time he would imagine himself sitting with Natasha. Both of them would enter one of God's most beautiful temples, their hearts and feelings full of humbleness and reverence. There they would thank the creator for bringing them together and for providing them the ability to love each other so deeply!

This ritualistic fantasy went on for some time, four months to be exact, until one day Jamil's brother, Karim, returned home from his work at the capital. Normally this would be a very joyous occasion but this time was different. His brother was not happy, his face showed great sadness and he carried horrible and terrifying news.

The wonderful family who had hosted him in Amman had suffered terrible losses because of their relatives' passion for freedom. Karim explained that the family had been receiving condolences from relatives, friends and acquaintances because of their massive loss of family due to their involvement in the Chechnyan Resistance Movement. A Russian guided missile had killed the entire family: father, mother, two sons and a daughter, Natasha. The missile had exploded, demolishing the building and had buried them alive in their house!

As a result of his brother's tragic story, Jamil was overwhelmed with grief. The family's horrible plight had struck his ego, and his weak body just could not handle the emotional break-down. Instead of three weeks, he was bedridden for four months. His condition horrified his family and puzzled his doctor, friends and even the *Imam*! Jamil had been attending school at this time, but was unable to continue because of his horrible health, and his absence from school did not come without consequences. He would need to repeat the whole year upon his much anticipated recovery.

Now, after many years, Jamil was sitting in the lobby of his hotel in London after meeting Amanda when he suddenly remembered where he had seen her before! Natasha and Amanda were identical twins. Both were tall, slim and beautiful with soft skin, blond hair, blue eyes and compassionate, charming smiles. And if Jamil believed in the transmigration of souls- metempsychosis- he would say with all truthfulness and sincerity that Natasha's soul and body had transmigrated into Amanda! Hallelujah, Hallelujah! God is great! God is merciful! God is compassionate! He is the creator of the universe! There is no god except Him. He is the only One to be worshipped. Praise is to Him! Glory to His name! Indeed, he is the most Gracious, the most Merciful, the most Generous, the most High, the most Compassionate!

Chapter 6

Sitting in his seat by the window in Buckingham station in London the following day, watching the station activity as the train pulled out, Professor Jamil Dahshan felt so full of energy and love that he could defeat an army with his high spirits and house the love of all the beautiful women of the world with his heart! The train picked up speed and the countryside rolled by. As he watched the scenery he became aware that a light rain was falling.

Rain in August! How little this land seemed to need it! How much it is needed elsewhere in the world! Mother's roses would drink up this moisture with avarice and then reward Mother Nature with enchanting blooms. That is, if mother still had her rose bush. The sounds of the wheels as they rolled on and on chewing up the miles between himself and his childhood friend gave a sense of coziness and security. Soon they would be together again after four years of separation. They could, and no doubt would, take stock of each other and of themselves also. How great it would be!

Would Zaynon have changed? Jamil knew that he himself had changed. His slender frame seemed to grow thinner each year, more wiry and tense. His attractive dark brown eyes now seemed more piercing and had taken on a larger, more haunted look. His Semitic nose had taken on more prominence. It seemed to him as he shaved that his thick lips had grown more sensual. His large white teeth shone startlingly against his olive skin. His once massive stock of black curly hair had lost much of its abundance.

He and Zaynon were the same age within six months, alike in many ways yet different in more. Both were cursed by ambition. He had lied to Amanda. How could he have told her their exodus was caused by their rebellious natures? by their mutual frustration at so many taboos and restrictions imposed by their culture? Had his dear friend found the coveted freedom? Had he? In many ways he decided he had. And yet he wondered whether he would ever be totally free from his beginnings, or whether he would carry them all his days like a pack camel of the desert, plodding along, bearing his burdens, known or unknown, into the sunset of his destiny. Wasn't this desire for freedom the reason he had never married? The glib answer for the boys was, "Why spoil the excitement of conquest?"

The gray beauty of the gently rolling land and the small towns seen in the light of leaden skies dampened Jamil's spirits and he admitted at last that this was not really so. He had never loved a woman. If a woman were beautiful, he loved this quality. If she were both pure and lovely, he was able only to worship her and take all she could be persuaded to give. Always he tired of a woman soon, and the bondage of hunger was all that was left. If there was no freedom in his life, it was because of this hunger.

A jolt of the train as it stopped again aroused Jamil from his reverie and he glanced through the window. He was in Oxford. There stood Zaynon, waiting. They embraced affectionately, giving profuse greetings in Arabic. Jamil noticed how little the years of their separation had changed his friend. He wore a few extra pounds perhaps, but they were not unattractive on the tall frame. Zaynon looked a little younger than his 28 years, while Jamil felt himself to look a little older.

Zaynon carried a share of the luggage and led the way to a very sporty, red car in the parking area. They drove a short distance to a house set back a bit from the road, partially hidden by a border of young trees with neat lawns and flowerbeds on all sides. They wound around the curved drive to stop in front of a beautiful wooden door. The host unlocked it and led the way into a world of beauty. In the living room Zaynon started to put down the bags. Instead, he turned to Jamil and suggested, "Let's put this luggage away first thing. Come! You are home now. Your room is next to mine down this hall."

As his door was opened, Jamil viewed another world of order and refinement. Windows lined one whole side with sliding doors opening onto a small pebbled area with table and chairs for a guest's quiet hours. The four-poster of intricately carved wood and matching night tables was resting on a Persian rug predominately a vibrant shade of blue. The masculine beauty of the rich, red leather chair and ottoman matched the border of the carpet and the heavy drapes of the same shade. The bedspread was of the purest white, heavily woven and a delightfully designed fabric from Damascus. The walls also were of a pure white, textured fabric, striped with the same blue as the carpet.

Zaynon, standing in the doorway chuckling said, "Glad you appreciate my efforts. You inspired this room. It is yours."

"Thanks for the nicest room I've ever had. But you worry me. Aren't you dreadfully in debt?" Jamil asked.

"No, I paid cash for all of it-every penny of my inheritance. Now I am back living on my salary and hustling to do so," Zaynon confessed. He waited while the luggage was emptied and quickly put away in the empty drawers. The gracious host then said, "I'll go fix you a snack and make us both a drink."

"Don't bother; I ate a bite on the train," Jamil responded with a smile. "I have noticed that English girls are more reserved than the Americans. They are less attracted to an occasional wink or invitation from a total stranger. But this certainly does not make them inaccessible, just a greater challenge." He paused a second and added, "I met another English girl on the train and gallantly invited her to a cup of tea. Just when we had reached a kind of mutual appreciation and she had begun to respond to my charm, we arrived at Oxford! Of all the ill-cursed luck! The train ride was too short for us to build up any confidence or some level of affability." Jamil became more excited and over wrought. "If only there had been one more station, I would have had adequate time to learn of her address and spark our friendship!" Anger momentarily flashed over his face.

"You said that you met *another* girl?" Zaynon asked, his eyes focusing on Jamil, trying to penetrate his thoughts.

"Yes, there was!" Jamil said with exuberance and a touch of hysterical enthusiasm. "It is a long story. I will tell you all about it later on! It is very interesting and exciting indeed."

"Are you still obsessed about making relationships with English girls?"

"Yes, much more than ever!" Jamil replied licking his lips voluptuously, "especially those who are tall, slim, blond, blue eyed, their skin like tender butter and their bodies like soft silk. They are nymphs from paradise. They have a charm I cannot resist! They make wildfires flame in my heart. They are of a different world than me, a world of charm and magic. Looking at them is intoxicating and encourages me to run amok."

"Wait, wait! What has happened to your sanity?" Zaynon burst out laughing. After he stopped laughing, he asked, "How about a glass of whiskey?" But even before he heard Jamil's answer, he added, "Now don't tell me you don't drink after living these years far away from taboos," he chuckled, "and now that Mother Aminah's eyes are not watching you anymore."

"I'm glad mother doesn't have to know the way I live. I've broken so many of her taboos," Jamil said, sadly. "God forgive me," he added, in a lower voice.

"She is the epitome of goodness and purity. How was she to know that her strictness was to be a cross you couldn't bear? All she wanted was a good son. Remember, she had to be both father and mother to you boys after the death of your father. That was a big responsibility," Zaynon declared from the bar, where he was starting on the drinks. "Is scotch and soda alright?"

"I prefer scotch on the rocks, no water. Please make it a double!"

"Your mother probably thinks you are wearing out the knees of your trousers kneeling in the mosques of America, praying the five daily prayers exactly at the times stipulated!" Zaynon chortled and playfully accused, "I'll bet you haven't been on your knees to perform one single prayer since you left your mother's home."

"Oh, I've been on my knees alright," Jamil confessed, "many, many times, only it was on plush carpets in fragrant boudoirs, at the feet of virginal goddesses waiting in satins and silks."

"My God! I'm horrified at how much you have changed," Zaynon said, "I just cannot believe my ears! Is this Jamil who religiously used to pray five times daily, without exception, and never looked a woman in the face without trembling and breaking into a cold sweat?"

"That was pre-Islamic history," Jamil said. "The complexes within my society were pressed upon me since childhood and are now permanently rooted within me. They have infected me with a grave and sober-minded disposition. He took a sip of whiskey and added, "The long separation and deprivation from women, the taboos, the fiery threats of judgment day and eternal imprisonment in hell; all these have been nurtured within me as a child and I can no longer cut them out. They torture me continuously and sometimes, I find myself riddled with guilt so intense that it disturbs my sleep."

Once again, he took a gulp of whiskey, but this time a larger one, before continuing. "I feel that within me a beast stirs whose ravenous appetite is never satisfied, or I burn with an unquenchable fire. Like a rabid dog I desire in a frenzied madness to fall in love and sleep with every beautiful woman I meet to compensate for my long deprivation from which I suffered since childhood."

A longish pause followed as they drank. Zaynon stirred and asked; "Did I ever tell you that sometimes my "women friends" wear silk and lace undies? I rather like the black lacy ones."

Jamil came up out of his chair, his two hands clashing together like cymbals while peals of laughter rolled from him. When he could get his breath, he gasped for air. "That's good! I can just see your old men dashing importantly about town at nightfall in their silks and laces with you in hot pursuit."

Jamil interrupted himself by a sudden sobering up, casting a calculating look at the other. He demanded, "Was your date last night, the one clad in black lace and all perfumed, the person you preferred over me? Is that why you didn't meet with me?"

At a sheepish nod from Zaynon, Jamil continued, "You dog! So that was why you weren't there to meet me. I guessed it," he continued with his mock anger. "You were with one of your 'loves'." He hesitated and then continued, "Have you ever felt that any of them really loves you for who you are?"

"It isn't often. I am sure Arthur did. How else can one explain his leaving me all his worldly goods?"

"He really left you everything?"

"Yes, even his library. It has overrun a large part of my den. Can you believe it contains only masterpieces and classics? All the books have been selected with rare precision and knowledge. How innocent and trusting he was, and had such good taste!"

Jamil preferred to think of Arthur as a stupid simpleton, but he avoided injuring his friend's feelings. "Didn't he realize that you hate reading and are in fact allergic to books?"

"Yes, but he always had hopes of changing me."

"Do you think you will change?"

Zaynon shook his head. "I have so many hobbies that my free time is eaten up and there is no time left for reading and writing."

"I am sorry." Jamil said with sadness, "but betting on horses, dogs, and chasing old men are destructive hobbies."

"But it gives me great pleasure and satisfaction!" Zaynon said in a raised voice.

Jamil refrained from commenting.

"Do you still spend fourteen hours daily reading and writing as you used to do back home?" Zaynon asked.

"Not exactly," Jamil said. "Back home I had nothing to do after the short hours of work except reading. But in America there are a lot of activities, such as attending parties, courting women, climbing mountains, fishing and swimming which we were deprived of back home."

"You know, Jamil," Zaynon said, "you might laugh at me. I sometimes wonder if Almighty God in His high heaven is even going to bother to judge us on the Day of Judgment. We people of the old world, from the day we are born to the day we die, hear that our every action is 'taboo' and we're going to be punished in deep Hell! So we spend our lives in fear, not committing any sin."

"Don't worry! You and I will compensate for those bad days, since we are living in the Western World," Jamil said.

After a moment of silence Zaynon said, "I am sorry about last night, but I knew you would understand. He was an aristocrat, an illusive son of a pig. Last night was the only hope. Forgive me?"

"I have done better than that and actually thank you for a very wonderful evening. Perhaps mine wasn't as rewarding as yours but time may just take care of that. Let me tell you about a golden flower named Amanda, a girl a man can rarely find in life!"

Zaynon, a good, appreciative audience, commented only when the story was finished. "She sounds like a great girl. Why didn't you invite her here for a visit? I even have a room for her. I'm not joking. She and I might strike up a real friendship. Don't look so surprised. Just because I don't want to take women to bed doesn't mean I don't enjoy their company. I occasionally invite women out to dinner, but they wonder why I don't try to maneuver them into bed, or why I don't invite them out for dinner again." Zaynon added mischievously, "If you had Amanda to entertain you, I wouldn't have to stay home every evening this whole month to keep you company!"

His bantering over, Zaynon took a good look at the other's face and it caused him to question. "What's brewing? I know that look of yours!"

"I believe I have the idea that might bring her here to visit. I hate to take notes at lectures, always have. I listen attentively to the lecturer for I indulge myself in his thoughts. But by taking notes I scatter the logic of his ideas, as I cannot concentrate on what the speaker is saying. I think it spoils the intellectual pleasure. Amanda is intelligent enough to grasp the material very well. Also, she seems to adore being

helpful. I'll simply call this evening and let her know that I, once again, need her help."

"Whoa! You're not in America, man! Let's try a little finesse," Zaynon admonished. "First I will order some flowers immediately to be sent to her. Second, you will go to the conference tomorrow and then place a strong plea for help at noon. Third, I'll extend an official invitation to my 'bit of heaven' early evening. She should be on the train Tuesday afternoon, ready to work," Zaynon assured, as he headed for the telephone.

"Wait until evening," Jamil suggested.

"No, No, No! It is better to do it right away! English women are far more reserved and conservative than other Western girls. They politely resist all first attempts to get them into bed. You are entirely dependent on their mood; for your mood and opinion remain superfluous. Any other behavior is viewed as prostitution!"

Jamil snorted sarcastically, "That's just what you think! Women are women all over the world regardless of nationality. They enjoy nothing better than being laid."

"That's a myth, Jamil! Some women would not let you lay a hand on them even if you were to pay them with all the wealth of Jordan. Only if a woman loved you would it be otherwise. And a simple thing as a date is far from being her permission to hop into her bed."

Jamil, recalling Amanda's own words, saw the truth in Zaynon's argument. "Perhaps you are right. Come to think of it, Amanda was very insistent and dogmatic when she told me that no man had ever taken her to bed and no man would even if she were to fall in love with him. She would have to be certain – no, convinced – that the man she loved was someone she would marry. Any suspicion or doubt in her mind would keep him out of her bed." He took another sip of his drink, followed by something from the platter of appetizers.

"Her belief and love must be rock-solid, and she considers her body a temple granted to her by God. And it is not to be abused. Allowing more than one man to use it would be abhorrent to God. It must be kept pure. Otherwise, it is contemptible and mortifying, an insult to the Giver and the Gift!" In surprise Jamil wondered how the impression and knowledge of Amanda's thoughts could hold such sway over his mind. For in one single memory of her, he had felt his opinion towards women shift dramatically, a fact that did not escape Zaynon's attention, who recognized this as the power of love.

"I understand that some people believe that, but, it is an odd way to think today," Zaynon said aloud to himself.

"According to our religion and upbringing it is the correct way of thinking!" Jamil said.

"I loath it! I hate it!" Zaynon was vexed.

"Believe me, Zaynon, my time in America taught me that our culture is comprised of many good morals, and the West greatly desires such morals, for they lack these beliefs which are a foundation of life."

"I am sure that is true, but these morals are scant and I could, rather can, easily live without them. They are no more necessary than salt is in our food."

"But remember, food without salt is unpalatable!"

Both laughed and both took a gulp of their drink. Then Jamil said, "I'm tired of cheap girls. I mean the ones who are too casual about who they sleep with. And only after the first invitation even! Think how many men have followed that path before me? I want to be the first, the number one man, and I want to stay the first!" Jamil continued ardently and enthusiastically. "I adore chastity, purity, virginity in a woman. I want my girl to be elegant, dignified, and full of pride and self-esteem."

"I agree, even in England you may find some, but there are very few Jamil. Yes, very few."

"I told you, Zaynon, Amanda is the one!"

"I think you are in big trouble, my friend! You are not going to get anywhere with her," Zaynon continued. "I once invited a girl out because I sometimes enjoy the company of women. After dinner, I brought up the possibility of continuing the conversation at my place, which was surely more conducive to relaxed discussion particularly as I have a good selection of wine at home. The offer was refused, and we remained seated.

"Later I aired the suggestion again. This time, it was rejected with a little more force. The third time I was angrily rebuked. When I pressed for a reason, she claimed she would not return to the home of a bachelor. Intrigued by this inexplicable reply, I again pressed with my question, only to become even more furious when she stormed out of the restaurant. I chased after her and offered to drive her home, but she wouldn't hear of it and hailed a cab. Believe me, Jamil, I had honorable intentions and expected only conversation. You know I have no inclination to touch women."

"I am sure if you were to invite her again to your house she would accept, even if she thought you were trying to maneuver her into bed." Jamil said naively.

"That is where you are mistaken, my friend!" Zaynon said. His teeth were clenched as his anger rose rapidly. Talking about the incident had re-ignited his indignation. "Some girls are very stubborn. Well, I was provoked tremendously by her arrogance. I called her many times but her only reply was to hang up on me! When I went to her flat, she slammed the door in my face! When I continued knocking again, she raged at me and threatened to call the police and bring charges."

"Since you have no intention of sleeping with her, why do you continue to bother her?"

"She humiliated me! Call it a matter of pride."

"You mean false pride!" Jamil chuckled. "If she had assented to go to bed with you, would you have sex with her?"

"Of course not! Women disgust me sexually!"

"Do they still? I thought you had thrown off the chains of that stupid sinful behavior! Surely, your obsessions for men were driven only by a lack of women at home." Jamil was plainly disgusted by his friend's wrong proclivities.

"That's where you are wrong! As a result of my English stepfather back home, I had the chance to meet and associate with numerous English women, both married and single. And I had the opportunity to sleep with many of them, but never did! I simply feel no sexual inclination towards women. They do not excite me!"

"You don't know what you are saying! Nor do you know what you are missing, my dear friend!" Jamil said.

"I am afraid it is you who doesn't understand. It is more enjoyable to be in a bed with a man rather than a woman. At least there is no fear of your partner becoming pregnant or being asked for child support and alimony for the rest of your life."

Jamil was struck with disgust and trembled violently. "I still remember what the *Imam*, Al-Sheik Abdul Haleem, told our class when we studied religion . When a man has sex with other men, God in the highest heaven trembles and the Seven Earths shudder I am trembling severely too with woe and anger! God forgive us! It is too awful!"

"Don't believe that stupid *Imam*!" Zaynon laughed. "If it is true, the Seven Earths will never stop shaking and will eventually fall, for there will always be –

every single hour of every single day – a human male making love with another male like himself. There is nothing more delightful, more enjoyable, than being naked with another man in bed!"

Jamil was too upset to continue the argument and after excusing himself, went to the garden for some fresh air. He felt contaminated by Zaynon's filth and wanted to vomit. "Oh, Almighty! Have mercy on your stray creature!" Jamil said, wiping, with the back of his hand two burning tears that had begun to fall.

Chapter 7

The English Madonna hesitated in committing herself to *The Arab Sheik*, saying merely that she would consider the idea and have an answer ready by late evening. Zaynon's charming, cultured voice, full of sincerity and emotion, urged gently that she come to Oxford and give him the honor of meeting her. He even offered to come to London and drive her up to Oxford. He told her he was looking forward to her opinion on his recent decorating efforts! He urged proudly, and added that his poor friend needed help badly. Miss Amanda Hamilton agreed to come the following day, but on the 4 o'clock train.

Zaynon left work a bit early and picked up Jamil. They drove into the parking area a few minutes before train time. As the young lady stepped down, Jamil was by her side, greeting her and thanking her again for her kindness in coming to his aid. As she and Zaynon met, Jamil noticed a warm, passionate look pass between them. He knew and was glad to see that they would get along splendidly.

"I want to thank you both for the lovely yellow roses. Every woman appreciates such a delightful surprise and such thoughtfulness," the young lady said as they went to the parking area.

"If we had sent you all the flowers and roses in the entire country it could not have satisfied our measure of love, respect and admiration for you," Zaynon burred with a childish joy.

"You are too generous and kind. Thank you both so much for the compliment." The charming lady's words were laden with gratitude.

"Sending you the flowers was Zaynon's idea," Jamil said as he burst out laughing. "If Zaynon had listened to my ingenious advice, we would have sent you a few kilos of lamb meat, tomatoes, eggplants, green beans, onions and cucumbers."

"You forgot to mention the fruits for dessert," Zaynon said.

Jamil had difficulty suppressing his laughter. Zaynon joined Jamil in conspiratorial giggling while the young lady looked puzzled by such seemingly irrational laughter. Her eyes flicked between the two of them inquisitively.

When they both ceased laughing and had wiped their tears with the backs of their hands, Zaynon explained. "I'm sorry. This must appear rude, but back home in the villages and even some small towns, when a chap wants to send a gift to a girl to

express his adoration and amour, he takes a large white cloth, something like a large handkerchief, and fills it with meat and every available vegetable, then ties the corners and sends it to her.”

“Why?” Amanda was perplexed.

"This is an Arabic version of the flower bouquet or the box of candy that is practiced in small towns and villages. The vegetables feed her family for that day. "

Zaynon's answer shed some light on the matter.

"Oh! Now I understand. You mean that you had some crazy intention of sending me vegetables instead of flowers!" She burst out laughing. "What would I have taken you for? But I guess it is not such a bad idea." She opened her handbag and found a handkerchief to wipe her eyes with. "Do you mean they order the food by telephone, like we do with the flowers?"

"No! They order the tomato, onion and eggplant by fax!" replied Jamil, immediately regretting the sting attached to his witty reply, but he had been amazed at her naivety.

The happy, young lady blushed in embarrassment.

He tried to repair the conversation and recover her poise to conceal her shame. "They have no telephones in the villages. Because they have never been a world power, I can't imagine you'd be aware of their insignificant history. They barely have water to drink, let alone telephones and faxes.

When a chap wants to express his adoration of a young lady, he buys the goods and sends them with his younger brother or sister with a message that the package is a gift from his mother to the girl's family. Otherwise the girl would be embarrassed in front of her parents and the rest of the members of her family for they would reproach her for flirting." After wetting his lips with his tongue, he added, "If she had a conservative father or brother, he might beat her because she had disgraced the family's honor.”

"How does the girl know that the gifts are a compliment to her? And anyway, it wasn't her fault, even if the gift was for her!" Amanda was vexed and frustrated.

To avoid the conversation winding up in a vicious circle, Zaynon changed the subject. "Didn't you tell your mother that she was invited? We would have loved to have entertained her. She was welcome to be our guest for two or three days. It would have been a change of scenery for her."

"I extended your invitation to her, but my father could not have coped with her absence. Lately he is very dependent on her," Amanda said. As an afterthought she added, "I don't mean he is physically incapable. He is still very strong for his age, although he will be 72 in October. But emotionally he cannot be away from Mother!"

"Why didn't you invite them both? I have plenty of room. They could use my bedroom. I would have been happy enough to sleep on the sofa," Zaynon replied.

"It seems to me that older people are more sentimental and more attached to others than we are," Jamil said. The three laughed together as the car entered the driveway.

"Lady Hamilton, welcome!" Zaynon said gaily, as he held the door and ushered her in with a sweeping motion. "I hope you will always feel at home in this house. Make yourself comfortable while I fix a drink. Jamil told me you don't drink, but I bought something especially for delicate female teetotalers. It is a very light ladies drink."

"I'm sorry to have caused you any bother. I hope you already had it on hand, and didn't buy it with me in mind," she said.

"Myself and my friends all like a stiff drink, but who is more precious and dearer to our hearts than you, Lady Hamilton." The host busied himself at the bar and then asked, "How do you feel about the colors I . . . Where are you?" he asked, turning, glass in hand. The astonished young lady was standing in front of the large fireplace, apparently looking at the huge Utrillo painting above the mantle.

Zaynon stood watching the girl for a brief moment, as though in deep appreciation of her obvious beauty. "I like his work very much. Only I sometimes wonder whether this one is too delicate for this large room," he presented as more of a statement than a question.

"No, I like it very much but, the real gem here is this wood; such intricate carving! I should think it a masterpiece. The arabesque design is poetry in wood. Where ever did you find it?"

"Your praise is doubly gratifying since my own people did this carving years ago. I found some large old chests with massive carved lids in the dusty storehouses of Damascus on my visit home two years ago. I fell in love with them. They are demanding lovers to live with, I have found. Alas, they seem to be dust catchers. I had only the lids sent here; that cost me quite enough. One you see as the mantel; the other

is the center panel of the door you admired as we entered," Zaynon explained with great pride.

"Then you took the subtle tones and textures of stone and wood and the colors of the painting as the motif for this charming room." Amanda's long, tapering fingers swept the room as she turned, face radiant with pleasure, completely charmed it seemed.

At that moment Jamil felt that she was totally desirable.

"If this is a typical sample of your artistic nature, please show me more," she exclaimed feverishly.

"Then let me show you to your room. I'll take the bags at the same time," Zaynon suggested as he picked up the larger bag.

Amanda picked up the small one for cosmetics and wandered down a hallway on the opposite side of the house from the men's rooms. Jamil followed, curious about this part of the house still unknown to him. The young professor saw the Madonna stand very still in the doorway. As he reached her side and looked into the room, he too stood speechless!

Before him was a totally feminine world, a fluffy world of ruffles and satins. Thick white carpeting covered the floors. The walls and ceiling were covered in white brocade. By the side of the bed, velvety rugs of an exquisite shade of Chinese jade reposed in front of the antiqued night stands on which stood lamps with amber bases and white satin shades at the top of which hung tear drop pearls on a gold braid. The bed, Jamil noticed, was of good size. Covering it was a great expanse of pale coral satin with bolster and headboard of tufted velvet in a deeper shade of the same color. The bewildered young man felt lost in a fairyland of color and dream fluff. He had seen a good many fancy, feminine bedrooms, but never anything as completely luxurious, sumptuous, lavish and rich as this!

Jamil was unaware of the others as he stepped in and saw for the first time, against one wall near a corner, a chair in jade velvet seemingly awaiting an oriental princess. Hanging above by a gold chain was a swag lamp with its profusely lighted cluster of amber balls. Beside the chair stood a large, carved brass tray straight from the shops of Damascus resting on a stand with carved wooden legs. The chair was placed in front of sliding doors that led out to a patio. It was curtained with heavy patterned coral satin framed by sheer curtains of white, pulled back, layer after layer, like a dancer's veils!

Voices reached Jamil's consciousness and revealed that they others were not in the room. As he peered around the corner into the bathroom and beyond the attached dressing room which were both done in the same sumptuousness, color and décor, he continued to follow the voices. The amazed young fellow turned, and again the bed caught his eye. Realization dawned. His stomach lurched a bit, and a deep need for fresh air pulled him quickly to the great carved door and the beckoning yard beyond.

Ever since sex had entered his life, and he had learned about Zaynon's sexual inclination and alien sensations felt for other males, Jamil resolutely viewed the matter with distaste and repulsion! Whenever an image of Zaynon and Captain Davidson entered his mind, he felt seized by nauseating bouts of disgust. He wanted to throw up. His stomach, a tight knot, pushed hard into his throat in revulsion to the idea.

All his senses revolted at any thought of Zaynon. His throat constricted as he shied away from that leprous image. He felt as if an iron hand had clamped itself over his mouth, and he struggled to breathe. He was attacked by vertigo, the ground shifted treacherously beneath his feet, and waves of dizziness circled within and around him while his sense of balance spun unsteadily.

Despite the demands resulting from a long friendship, Jamil could not entertain his impression of Zaynon's queerness, and his morals failed conclusively and miserably to judge it tolerantly. These feelings were independent of his love and respect for his friend. This queerness to Jamil represented a failing in Zaynon's manhood, an underutilized drive for female companionship.

As long as he could remember, Jamil had been drilled and taught against the evils of homosexuality. The opinion on the issue was a communal and religious opinion. Never was the individual allowed to form their own decision. Abhorrence of homosexuality came as a birthright, a communal wall, a defense against the disgrace of active and passive love between men. Such men became cancerous outcasts, corrupt members destined to be cut out and eliminated from society. These sodomites were destined to sink into the deepest mires of hell.

The story of Lot in the Holy Quran was conclusive proof of Jamil's view; God was infuriated by the people of Lot and their lustful pursuit of sodomy. His revenge was swift and he tipped their city upside down, killing the inhabitants and burning them in deep Hell.

Jamil started down the curved drive that led to the open road. He stopped to admire a rose garden to his right, protected from the dust of the road by the hedge of small trees. He bent to the fragrant blooms and inhaled deeply. Why not pick one for Amanda... a bud for her room where it would open-as she herself might if properly handled. He removed his knife from his pocket and prepared to cut a long stemmed beauty of a rich salmon color.

Unexplained dissatisfaction stayed his hand, and he drew back. His searching eyes then caught the pure china white loveliness of another large one in mid-bloom. He felt a deep certainty about it. He started back toward the house, smelling the fragrance and marveling at the moist delicacy of its velvety petals.

As Jamil studied these petals, they seemed to metamorphous into a breathtaking cameo having the outline of white silk sheets turned down. The corresponding curve of plump smoothness in the rose was suddenly a pillow to his eyes, a pillow over which a mass of long jet black hair lay, falling over the sheets in profusion. The vision caused his breathing to become labored, and perspiration stood on his forehead as the faintest hint of a profile began to appear. The features seemed beautifully familiar and delicate in spite of the darker complexion of the face as it reposed on the pure white, fragrant pillow.

Jamil was overwhelmed by the stifling fragrance of the rose. If only he could call it out, scattering the fragrance to the four winds, perhaps the spell would be broken. But not a breath of air was stirring. As his eyes gazed at the cameo, it abruptly faded and nausea flooded him. He only vaguely realized that he was snapping off the bloom and putting it into the pocket of his coat, down into the darkness. This was not Amanda's rose. It belonged to another! Yes, it belonged to a woman with greater, more demanding appeal. Amanda's fair skin and hair could never be so vital a contrast against white silk.

Jamil's thoughts began to wander dangerously. "Would Amanda fall in love with Zaynon?" he asked himself. The idea irritated him, but he could not stop this line of thought. "He possesses everything a woman could desire from a man. A good income, nice home, steady job, romance without sex." The last idea fueled his jealousy.

With almost deliberation, he forced himself around to the side of the house where he entered his own bedroom via the patio. Soon he heard his name, and Zaynon said, "Oh, there you are! We finished our tour of the house, and have been visiting.

How about joining us for a drink before changing? I am taking you to my club for dinner."

Jamil sat sipping his second drink. The first had been sent on its way, quickly dispatched, to give immediate aid to his shaken nerves. It was his hope that the vision might be pushed down into the darkness of his subconscious, where he hoped it would perish little by little, as the petals of the rose would slowly wither. But, he knew, that in the end, they would still be there, dead and dried, waiting to be thrown away completely.

What could one do with haunting memories? The happy tones of the others in conversation brought comfort, as though they could reach into all dark, hidden recesses and flood them with light and fresh breezes. Maybe they were the ones to put memories to rout on the wings of fleeting, happy moments. The dreamy young man must have dozed, for when Zaynon's bantering voice called, "Come all, let us now go to prepare ourselves for the coming feast and merry-making," Jamil jumped.

A feast it was. Jamil was surprised at his good appetite, noticing only that his body was physically tired. Because of his companions' contagiously happy spirits, he would be game for anything. It was the charming Amanda who suggested the merry-making be postponed for another evening. She told them happily, "My highest wish is to spend this evening sitting around a cozy fire, relaxing and visiting in that lovely room. I certainly don't want to spoil it for the two of you."

"In this case, we will have a simple dinner here at home," said the host.

"That is an excellent idea. I like it very much," the lady guest said.

"What do you have for us to eat, Zaynon?" asked Jamil.

"I have several cans of mushrooms and split pea soup. I have chicken breasts and beef steak I could cook on the grill, and, of course, a lot of bread. I have the makings for a green salad too. Or would you prefer I order pizza?"

"No need for pizza," Amanda said. "What you have on hand is more than enough."

"In that case, give me half an hour and dinner will be ready," Zaynon said as he headed for the kitchen.

"Wait! Please wait! Professor Dahshan and I will help you." As Amanda said this, she looked at Jamil, who put down his drink and joined them.

After eating dinner and washing the dishes, they returned to the living/sitting room. Zaynon lit a match to the waiting kindling, and they sat, dreamily watching the

flames run along the logs, hungrily consuming all around it. Jamil was reminded of love being consummated. The conversation ate up the hours, and it was hard for them to say good night and put an end to so heartening an evening.

As Amanda started down the hall, she turned back calling gently to them. "I almost forgot," she confessed. "Mother asked me to be sure to invite you for dinner Saturday evening. She wants you to spend as much time as possible and stay over for Sunday." Sincerity filled her words and face as she urged on her own behalf. "I hope you will, for I want you to meet my parents. Also, I would like another ride in that dreamy red car. Father is a black car man, at least in spirit."

"Well now, you shall have that ride and we will have a real home-cooked meal," Zaynon assured her.

"I would like to meet your parents and all those other fragrant blooms in your mother's greenhouse," Jamil teased. Stepping forward he placed a hand on Amanda's arm in a comforting gesture and added, "Sleep well. Tomorrow we will learn more about Islam. You may find out why we Muslims are privileged to have several wives at one time, and how we could entertain and amuse four wives at one time," Jamil said jokingly.

"I know why Mohammed gave the privilege to his followers to have more than one wife," she said while the dimples danced over her honeydew cheeks. "When Islam was founded in the sixth century and spread all over the world, the Muslim army lost a large number of its warriors because of conquest. Many women lost their providers, such as fathers, brothers and husbands. In order to avoid the starvation and prostitution of women, this religion gave its followers that privilege."

"Good girl," Jamil said. "You passed your first exam with a perfect grade."

"But Islam also imposed one strict stipulation: the husband should act justly; if he could not, then he should not take on more than one wife."

"Bravo! Bravo! Princess Diana," Jamil said. "In modern life, many Muslim men can hardly handle even one wife, let alone more than one!"

"You Arabs are accused of being anti Semitic," Amanda said.

"That is absolutely not true," Jamil said. "How could we be so when we are Semitics ourselves?" When Amanda kept silent, he continued, "The great grandfather of the Arabs and the Jews is the prophet Abraham who is also the father of all the prophets."

"Now that I come to think of it, it is true," she said.

“Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. We Arabs are the descendents of Ishmael and his wife Hajar. The Jews are the off spring of Isaac and his wife Sara. So we are really cousins.” Amanda nodded several times.

“We have been living together for thousands of years, in peace and harmony, love and respect for each other. Many Arab men married Jewish women and have children also. Our religion recognizes the people of the book: Judaism and Christianity, the Old and the New Testament.”

“So why the fighting and the bloodshed?” Amanda asked.

“The reason is the Zionist movement, a movement started in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century,” Jamil answered. “They are racists, radicals and fanatics and harbor vindictive feelings against the Arabs and everything Arabic!”

“Why are they that way?”

“They believe that Palestine and some of the surrounding Arab countries belonged to their ancestors, and it is their duty to retrieve it by obliterating or transferring its inhabitants, so they can bring every Jewish person from every corner of the world and establish the Great Israel.”

“It is stupid thinking,” Amanda said. “How could they obliterate or transfer those millions of people?”

“It is not only stupid; it is dangerous,” Jamil said. “So the Jewish agency supported by wealthy Jewish people all over the world-and as you know the Jewish people are extremely wealthy and very influential-started bringing Jewish young men and women from every corner of the world, paying them money, giving them housing accommodations, and training them to be fighters. With the help of the British Government that had the mandate of Palestine at the time, it had more than one hundred thousand fighters with the best and more modern military equipment.”

“Your people must hate us,” Amanda said with a sad shadow covering her face.

Jamil did not comment but continued speaking. “In 1948 those well-trained and excellently equipped fighters attacked the Palestinian cities and massacred thousands of inhabitants in cold blood, not differentiating between man, woman, or child, old or young.”

“How awful! “Did not the British army protect them since Britain was in charge of their protection?”

“On the contrary, the British Army prevented armed Arab men from coming to their aid until they had slaughtered thousands of them. Other thousands escaped. Huge sections of large and small cities, hundreds of complete villages, places of worship, orchards, vineyards, shops, factories, schools, libraries, museums, art galleries and cultural centers were demolished.”

“It was barbaric action,” Amanda said. “I do not blame you if you hate us.”

“We never hated you,” Jamil finally said. “We love the European and American people because the majority of them sympathize with our tragedy. But we hate your governments. Instead of helping the oppressed, they are helping the oppressor by giving billions of dollars, the most advanced weapons, and support in the United Nations agencies!”

“No doubt they are mistaken.” Amanda said. “It is not right.”

“As a result of that behavior, millions of Arabs and Muslims from all over the world became very angry and decided to fight against the interests of the Western world.”

“It is too bad. Sorry to hear that.”

“Unfortunately, as a result of the strong partiality of the Western world for Israel,” Jamil said, “many angry Muslims started forming groups to fight against the interests of the Western world. These groups are called terrorists.”

“Do I understand that if there were no Zionist movement, we would have no terrorism?”

“ABSOLUTELY!” And we would have never heard about Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden,” Jamil said.

“Oh, my God!” Amanda exclaimed. “What a mistake! It brought disaster to the world.”

“It did,” Jamil said. “Think of the millions of people who were killed from all parts of the world: Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Europeans, Americans and others who were involved in this tragic mess.”

“Weren’t there wise people in this world to stop this kind of tragedy?” Amanda asked.

“Yes there were many.” Jamil said. “I have heard and read from many Gentiles and Jews, Westerners and Easterners, Asians and Africans, rabbis, clergymen and laymen, statesmen, thinkers, philosophers, writers, military people, all kinds of people. They all agree that the thinking and behavior of the pro-Zionists was not only

very wrong but would bring destruction to the state of Israel itself. And that was not what the true Jewish people wanted.

“It is also, as far as I know, against the laws and teachings of the Jewish religion.” Amanda said.

“That is the reason why millions of Jewish people hate Zionist thought and believe it will destroy Judaism,” Jamil said.

“I consider myself educated and well read,” Amanda said. How did it happen that I did not hear about it?”

“For a simple reason,” Jamil replied. “As you probably know, all branches of the mass media in America and Europe are in the hands of the Zionist lobbyists who feed the people the propaganda that serves their goals.”

“I understand. I understand,” she said, “Thank you for enlightening me.”

The remaining days of the conference sped by rapidly. They were good days for Jamil, full of lectures and discussions. His secretary, by his side much of the time, seemed to find it an interesting experience and a challenging task.

He often saw admiring eyes on them as she walked by his side through the groups standing about discussing the latest lecture. He felt Amanda was increasingly warmer to him at such times. When they were completely alone, she seemed to withdraw a little. He wondered if this meant she didn't trust him, or perhaps, he thought hopefully, she didn't trust herself.

Chapter 8

Jamil's grandmother, Falha, held a special place in her heart for him. He was her favorite among the sixteen grandchildren who competed for her attention. All sixteen were the result of her daughters, for she had never had sons. Jamil, as the youngest of the brood, had been singled out by his grandmother, and the loss of his father had further endeared him to her. Her affection for him was founded on apparently innumerable odds stacked against him at such a young age. The young boy would spend a lot of time in his grandmother's house, often spending the night, despite the fact that only a wall separated their house from his grandmother's, and that his own bed was so very close.

The love between the two of them disguised this strange situation, and it appeared to be the most natural thing in the world. Often he would leave for school from her house, and return later in the day for a meal. His fondness for spending time on his grandmother's side of the house was influenced by her situation. Other than her spinster daughter, Mishkhus, she lived alone. The old lady always gave him gifts of sweets and foods for the two *'Eid'* holidays and new clothes in which he looked resplendent for the first day of school. These gifts remained a silent secret shared between the two of them, for the other grandchildren would be jealous at their special closeness, and would demand the same treatment, expecting to be lavished with gifts.

Grandmother, confiding in Jamil, opened his eyes to the reality of his parents' marriage. She told him of his grandfather's low opinion for his father at the beginning and his obstinate refusal over two years to allow him to marry Jamil's mother. Even his mother balked at the idea of marrying his father at first, in spite of his wealth and property, the manner in which he stood out among the city's population as a distinguished man, and his position as the head of his family, a tribe which numbered more than one thousand human beings! This reputation was the product of his former marriage in which he had four children, two boys and two girls. Now he was a widower who was looking for a new life. But he was rather dark, something which did not appeal to his future wife.

Jamil's mother's beauty was a customary point of discussion among the town men who celebrated it in conversation with verbal illuminations of its mesmerizing power. When crossing town to fill her pottery water jar, a distance of no more than

half of a kilometer, many men would flock to the edge of the road and attempt to engage her in flirtatious and meaningful glances. She was a pleurably cool balm for the eyes and veritable feast for the imagination, but no man was brave enough to talk with her. Custom dictated that any man doing so would risk scolding or beating, a threat extended by the family who would have felt their honor disgraced and the sanctity of their women violated.

Many respected and wealthy men approached her father and declared their marital intentions. All were accepted by him for he never turned anyone down. Unknown to the potential suitors, his acceptance was a signal for trouble. Later that day when the city had grown dark, he and a close friend would catch the man who was preparing himself for marriage to his daughter and beat him up. They would threaten him, claiming that this time beating was enough, but next time only God would save him. Jamil's mother and grandmother were oblivious to Jamil's grandfather's inspired sorties and mystified as to why the prospective groom never returned. Only later did they discover the truth.

Jamil was prompted to ask, "Was my mother that beautiful?"

"Beautiful is a drab comparison. She was ravishing! She was the most beautiful woman in town. No unmarried man was ignorant of Aminah Dahshan, and all had dreams of marrying her, however futile they understood them to be."

"Did my mother ever fall in love with any of these men?"

"God forbid that!" Grandmother was irritated. "Daughters are not brought up for love only. They may choose to fall in love only after their marriage," she replied emphatically.

"Do you mean I cannot marry for love?" Jamil's innocence pushed against the ties of his society.

"Of course you can, but your sisters cannot."

"Why not, Grandma? Don't we both have hearts and dreams?"

"Yes, yes, but our hearts cannot rule our tongues. There are customs to observe. A woman can fall in love after her marriage. She will be lucky to do so. But only her children must know. It is not a thing that can be shown outside the family."

Jamil was mollified, but another question still burned. "You say my father was rather dark, Grandma. Why am I very white, and my sisters and my brother too?"

His grandmother smiled. "Jamil, your childhood was more unusual than you would believe. You were a beautiful child and your mother went to great pains to hide

you from other mothers. She feared your looks would spark envy in them. For this reason she would place a bonnet over your head, tying it under your chin. A small package of alum and *shair molad* barley that was blessed in religious rituals was attached to the front of the bonnet and this hung over your forehead to deflect the evil eye."

"Grandmother, did you know my mother's feelings towards the men who wanted to marry her? Did she give you permission?"

"Yes, dear. Your grandfather was a God-fearing man, and he knew what was right. Your mother placed her trust in us, and knew we would pick a good man. How could she have trusted herself to choose a good man? Why, she never spoke to men or saw their faces. What experience or opinion of them could she use to choose?" After pausing for a minute as if to gather her thoughts, she continued. "

A well-bred woman, as I brought up your mother to be, looks neither left nor right as she walks down the street. Her eyes are focused ahead and downward, watching her feet. At no time does she gratify men by making any contact with them. Your mother was a model of discretion."

She laughed and added, "Your father was intrepid and daring; his courage was insurmountable. One late afternoon he waited for your mother, as he knew she was fetching water from the spring with two girlfriends who were neighbors. Your father was wearing his traditional *Abayah* cloak. When she passed, he swung it from his shoulders, and with an inspired chivalry, laid it before her path. He said, 'It is an offense for such a queen to walk on the bare earth. She deserves carpet, soft for her delicate feet. Let my cloak be that carpet and ease the difficulties of your journey.'"

"Wasn't he afraid of the consequences?" Jamil was amazed.

"Nobody dared. Your father was feared, and the men respected his position. He was safe from any consequences. But your mother was flushed with shame and embarrassment before the silent judgment of the town, for news of the event had coursed through the town like wildfire." The white-haired old woman laughed. "Your mother came home crying, but later, in the afterglow of the event, she felt only admiration for your father and wished to marry him."

"Why did my grandfather change his mind and give him permission to marry her?" Jamil asked.

"My husband finally saw the matter in a new light. He realized that in such a small town his brutal treatment of well-intentioned young men had become common

knowledge among the men, and they quickly forgot any marital intentions they may have had. If he turned your father down, then your mother might have never had another chance." She paused. "The dowry he asked for was very high, five kilograms of gold. But your father paid the gold eagerly without flinching. Overnight your mother became the center of town gossip. The town claimed that your father had a dowry equal to your mother's weight in gold."

"What! He hung her on a scale?" Jamil's imagination struggled with the picture of his mother sitting on one large scale pan while the other was filled with gold until the two arms were balanced.

"No, Dear, this is just a way of describing the enormous expense of the dowry." After a brief pause, she continued. "After his death, many men, widowed or married, even single men, asked for her hand and agreed to support you and your brother and sisters, but she turned all of them down. She claimed that her children filled the gap left by her husband's death, and she felt whole."

"So my father was very rich to be able to fund this amount of money," Jamil said.

"Of course he was, Sweetheart. I wouldn't say he was a multimillionaire, but he was quite rich. He owned a lot of substantially sized fields in many different places of the country. He farmed these lots with different kinds of crops, grains and vegetables. He had two vineyards and a large number of cattle, sheep, and goats."

"How could he manage to take care of all these chores himself?" Jamil asked naively.

Jamil's grandmother laughed and said, "He had several people working for him. Sometimes your mother had more than twenty family members and workers to feed."

"Did my grandfather dislike my father?"

"Heaven forbid that! Why would you think he didn't like your father?"

"Because of what he did to my mother, of course!"

"What he did to your mother made her and us very happy. It brought fame to her and to us, her family." Jamil's grandmother then licked her lips and said, "My husband clearly loved your father. As a matter of fact, he loved him much more than he loved his own two sons from his dead ex-wife. Your father was a gallantly generous man who feared God, prayed five times a day, and fasted the whole month

of Ramadan and the *Six White Days*. He always gave generously to the widows and the orphans, and we all loved him very much.”

Young Jamil felt proud of his father and had decided to ask another question, but his grandmother went on. “We have never considered him only a son-in-law; we have always treated him as though he were our son. God sent him to us as compensation for not having boys. He looked after us and took very good care of us. He used to get upset when we cooked for ourselves. He wanted us to eat from the Lord and would have your mother cook for us.”

Suddenly there was a break in the old woman’s story and the curious boy chimed in with his question. “How could Mother marry a widower with four children? Was it not better for her to stay single than to take on the care of a husband and four children who were not hers?”

“Sweetheart, this man expressed a genuine interest in your mother as soon as he saw her beauty and discovered upon inquiry that her personal reputation was as sweet as perfume and her family was well-known. She quickly fell for his charisma and charm. Her father knew that he had been a widower, and that she would be the new mother to his four children. Your grandfather hesitated for a moment, but after seeing how quickly she longed to become his wife, the decision was made.”

“But didn’t the townspeople. . .”

“Sometimes, my naïve little *habibi*, it is better for a woman to marry a widower who is already established, a man who can offer her everything she could ever want, provide her family with additional wealth and children and assure provision for all of their children. This established wealth and generosity proved that your father was not offering your mother a life of work or expecting her to take on a laborious life. It was quite the opposite! He had servants to take care of his two sons and two daughters. Your mother was there to love them, provide them with much needed motherly advice and to treat them as her own!” The amused grandmother chuckled at the curiosity of her young and vibrant grandson.

Just then one of her neighbor ladies, Habsa, Salameh’s mother, entered into her house. Some people keep their doors open from the time they awaken to the time they go to bed. The neighbor asked Jamil’s grandmother whether she could borrow two loaves of bread, offering in return, to give her two freshly baked loaves which she would bake in the evening and bring to her later.

Jamil became annoyed with the lady's interruption. He would much rather have heard wonderful things about his beloved family than barter bread loaves. He felt sure he and his grandmother would pick up their conversation as soon as the woman left, but the two old ladies chatted extensively, and the subject was never brought up again.

Chapter 9

After completing his secondary education in Salt, Jamil pursued advanced studies at the university in Cairo, Egypt, where he applied himself diligently, so that he could return to his homeland with the qualifications necessary to obtain honorable employment. At last his studies there were completed, and he had only a few loose ends to tie up before returning to his beloved homeland. Others of his nationality whom he had befriended at the university asked for favors when he returned home. Some wanted to send a letter to parents, others a book to a friend, and still others asked him to pay a visit to their families. These simple acts were tokens of their love and well-being.

Immediately upon arrival, Jamil applied to his home university for a job, hoping to enter the paid circle of academics. After organizing his affairs, he finally found time to complete those favors. Eager to be done with this obligation, he delivered some archaeological books he had been asked to carry to a researcher who was employed at the archeology department in Amman. Jamil had never met this person. This simple task was to generate Jamil's strongest and most lasting friendship, for it transpired that this young man was none other than Zaynon. Having been introduced, they quickly spun an easy and comfortable affinity with each other!

Zaynon, wishing to continue their conversation after the office hours insisted that they go out to lunch and refused to hear any objection from Jamil. Zaynon, being an archeology student who was acquainted with the members of high society and familiar with the better restaurants in town, took Jamil to a well-known place that specialized in *Shish Kebab*.

"Perhaps a beer?" Zaynon asked.

Jamil politely refused. "Thank you all the same. I have never tasted it. I really don't care to try it."

The host was not surprised, for many of his friends and companions abstained from drinking alcohol because of religion, health or social convictions. The host likewise refrained from drinking any alcohol during the lunch, possibly out of respect for his guest.

Zaynon was of a tall build, having broad shoulders and a wide chest. He had a strong muscular definition throughout and a bronze complexion, the envy of many, the sum of which meant an immediate presence of classic masculinity. When speaking with the fairer sex, he would always lower his gaze, a sign of modesty and religious fervor.

When Jamil met him for the first time and shook his hands, it was pure electricity. The bolt of Zaynon's personality surged through Jamil's body, from his hand to his head and then to his feet. That meeting was the foundation of a lasting, firm and satisfying friendship between the two young men. Soon they were never to be seen out of each other's sights, sharing tea with each other, walking the streets deep in conversation, or chatting with eagerness on the telephone. No day passed without the two being deep in conversation or discussing political, economical, social and religious problems. The two men continuously reveled in their spirited companionship.

The young scholar was very much interested in literature and philosophy, but Zaynon was passionate for sports, and Jamil was quickly caught up in the addiction! Soon both were busy swimming each weekend at the lone public swimming pool in a suburb of Amman or hunting small birds in the fields outside the city. Hunting was actually nothing but a convenient label to an activity that was effectively no more than an excuse to run and laugh in the fields as they playfully sought out small birds.

Zaynon lived with his English adopted father, who had remained single and unmarried after the death of his wife fifteen years before. He was living in an exclusive quarter of the city. The house reflected the latest in modern architectural design, surrounded by spacious gardens full of beautiful and rare plants which Mr. Leonard Dexter imported especially from different European countries. They employed a young Sudanese cook who was exceedingly polite, gentle, and spoke English fluently. His duties included cleaning and serving food and taking care of all household chores.

The comfortable life which Zaynon was living and the amount of money which he was spending made Jamil wonder whether it was coming out of Mr. Dexter's own pocket or really from the archeology department! Mr. Dexter and Zaynon never offered any information. The situation was certainly none of Jamil's concern.

Professor Dahshan, the new graduate, was greatly surprised by his friend's strong reluctance to read any of the literary classics. On rare occasions he picked up a book that concerned archeology. Even then his reading would be sporadic at best, a few minutes here and there, in complete reversal to his adopted father who was never seen without a book or magazine and was madly in love with literature!

Mr. Dexter's fervent literary passion was matched only by his love for flowers which he would fly in from abroad by special order. He spent most of his time after working hours tending them with great care and love. He caressed and teased life into them as one might do to a sweetheart or a child. On several occasions Jamil accompanied Zaynon to the airport to pick up a carton of bulbs that Mr. Dexter had ordered from abroad. Later he would stand observing the two men as they worked, the smile on their faces revealing their obvious enjoyment of the labor. Diligently they would water and dig the ground around them.

Mr. Dexter was a friend with all of the British expatriate community in the country and with a large number of Europeans also. His house was like an international club, subject to a continual flow of people as they paid their respects to him. They came alone, with family or with friends. They represented an entire spectrum of personalities and looks. All types of characters were represented. There were old and young, beautiful and ugly; businessmen and diplomats. There were no restrictions and few demands of his guests. He was a generous and respectable man, and his house never lacked for food or drink. He or his cooks were always willing to prepare something which would satisfy his guests.

Often Zaynon would invite Jamil to his house, and both young men would sit in the dining room or in the garden drinking tea and discussing different subjects and talking about future ambitions. During this time it was obvious to Jamil, for it was difficult to ignore, that many of the women who visited the house paid special attention to his friend. Many came with the full intention of meeting him, but hid their desire behind the pretense of meeting his father. If Mr. Dexter should happen to be away, they still came, blithely pretending to have been ignorant of his absence. All the time their hearts and eyes would flirt with Zaynon, openly and daringly, in Jamil's presence, making him envy his friend and wish that he were receiving that kind of attention.

It was late one hot afternoon as Zaynon and Jamil were sitting in the garden drinking tea, when suddenly an older woman opened the gate and walked confidently

towards them. Her stride and steady step emitted an air of vanity and arrogance, as if she were calling on the world to look at her. Their conversation was brought to an end when she stopped in front of the two young men's table and looked straight at Zaynon.

"How is my boyfriend today?" she asked. "When is he going to come over to my house for a drink?"

Her crooked smile and fiery eyes revealed a hunger to be desired by men. She could have been attractive had she not tried to look half her age. The false teeth and bright red lipstick were an obvious contradiction that revealed a deep insecurity. In an earlier day, she probably would have been considered extremely beautiful. Just a shadow of that beauty remained now.

"Please have a seat," offered Zaynon as he stood, "Can I get you something to drink?"

"No thank you. I'm in a hurry. I've just come to see whether Mr. Dexter is back from his trip to Jerusalem."

"He isn't scheduled to return until the day after tomorrow," said Zaynon.

"Oh, that's right. I forgot."

"Why don't you sit for a while? He'll be back soon," said Jamil absentmindedly, and obviously preoccupied. He was dreaming of spending a romantic night in her lap!

The woman burst out laughing while Zaynon tried to contain his anger as he shouted at Jamil in two languages. "I said that he would return after two days -- not two hours! You are *majnoon!* *Malhash isnaan walak, akbar min jidditak!* You are insane! She has no teeth stupid! She is older than your grandmother!"

"*Hatta law kaanat Akbar min jiddit jidditi?* Even if she was older than the grandmother of my grandmother, isn't she still a female?" answered Jamil. "*Heya mish immrah!*"

"I am sorry, Miss Green," said Zaynon politely. "My friend thinks it is not hospitable to let you go without serving you something first."

"Thank you anyway," she responded to Jamil. "I am in a terrible hurry. Maybe next time." Then she turned around and left the garden as confidently as she had entered.

After she left, the two men entered into a heated discussion regarding the purpose of women on earth. In his arrogance, Jamil strongly believed that women

were God's gift to men, and the world would be an awful place to live in if the fairer sex were not brightening it with love and companionship, a gift that his friend had frivolously rejected. Zaynon, however, felt that Jamil's philosophy regarding women was deplorable. After each had expounded his views, the two young men reached an agreement that Jamil would no longer mention Zaynon's relationships with the opposite sex.

The attention Zaynon received was starkly obvious, but Jamil was vexed. In not one instance had Zaynon attempted to further the seductive adulation he received, but instead erected a defensive wall between the women and himself. The suspicious young man had no proof that Zaynon had ever held a relationship with any of these women. Jamil noticed that despite the women's embarrassingly obvious attentions that showed in their half joking pronouncements of love for him, Zaynon never encouraged their line of thought and always remained at a polite distance, diplomatically turning down their offers.

What really surprised and shocked Jamil was that these luscious, beautiful women were openly flirting with Zaynon, talking about sex, love affairs and romance, frankly and openly, ignoring Jamil as if he were not in the room, or as if he were a heap of trash! But what was yet more incredible, Zaynon a man full of vitality, in the prime of his youth, full of lust, was totally unmoved by their advances! How he could resist these aggressive and randy, but charming women, Jamil could never understand!

The young stallion, frustrated at this waste, would fervently petition Zaynon to give him an opportunity to build his own relationship with one of these coquettish women. He believed that his friend abused their affection and tenderness, humiliated their femininity and failed to make the most of their love and intentions. But at every request he was rebuffed by his stupid, abusive, hideous and unappreciative friend.

Occasionally he grew angry and yelled, "If you don't want them, for heaven's sake, why don't you let me try my luck with them? I am craving to have a relation with these beautiful women! You know it is almost impossible to have a relation with a native female. Life is a barren desert without them!" Jamil asked.

"I caution you against that; it would anger me and our friendship might be threatened. I am not joking! I am deadly serious!"

Jamil was amazed and vexed. "Why would you do that? They are neither your sisters nor cousins. You have no genetic bond with them in any way. Yet that is how

you treat them. They are obviously courting you, and yet you abuse this display of emotion along with their femininity and passion, by ignoring their most beautiful and passionate desires!"

"But they are guests in my house and you know the respect we give to guests in our culture. Besides, my house is my sanctuary and refuge. I have the right to do as I will."

"That is just what an ignorant Arab man or woman would think because we were born in social bondage, have rotten moralities and cannot think beyond the frontiers of our own restrictive culture," Jamil said angrily. "But the European women, particularly the English women, view you as uncivilized, impolite and retarded, because you turn a blind eye to their beauty, affection and femininity. You fail to recognize their attempts at courtship or blatant signals that point to an open attention and need to sleep with you. They would not even be flustered or embarrassed if you responded positively to their signals. Why, you could even stand up and frankly pronounce, 'Yes I will make love to you! It is an honor!' If you don't do that, they will believe that you are dumb and stupid, and they will understand you to be blind to the taste of beauty and charm."

"Where did you find those pearls of wisdom? It is only now come to my attention that I have an intellectual bullshitting friend!" Zaynon's sarcasm was strong.

"Don't you laugh!" Jamil said. "This is not a figment of obscure imagination. I have read of such scenes and have mixed with people where all this has been plainly obvious."

"You are so very wrong!" Zaynon's rebuke was sharp, but he paused. Then he added, "Well, perhaps what you say has some truth; but regardless, I don't want any such thing to happen in my house. I don't want Mr. Dexter's opinion of me to change."

"On the contrary, if you don't make use of these women, your adopted father's opinion will most definitely change. Why, he can do nothing but interpret these actions as a failing in your character. How can you refuse to recognize the desires of beautiful women and expect to be judged as a sane and well-adjusted personality?"

"My father is ever serious and reserved with them, and I want to mold my self in that image. If you don't care for my philosophy, too bad! My opinion is final, and I will not revoke the very foundation of my beliefs." With this final statement he strode out of the dining room and through a door into the back garden.

Jamil feverishly debated Zaynon's final threat, as it was proving to be an unexpected and dangerous turn to their relationship. He did not want to stay, leave, end the friendship, or let it all blow over. But Zaynon made the decision for him by returning and offering an apology for his poor behavior. "I'm sorry, I don't want my adopted father to know that I am seducing his female guests, and do not want him to think that I am taking advantage of their respect for him."

"As you wish, Zaynon," Jamil said. The two young men never mentioned the subject again!

Chapter 10

Despite coming from a working class and religiously conservative background, Jamil's way of thinking and behavior were typically middle class and liberal in religious, social, and intellectual matters. He attributed this to his mother's remarkable personality and grit plus his brother's propensity of combining football skills on the pitch and intellectual prowess that filled the pages of local magazines and newspapers before he was eighteen years of age.

The frustrated young man's hot and feverish lust for Zaynon's female friends was of little surprise. Unaccustomed to the seductive and debauched manner in which a Western woman would carry her body, his blood would boil as it rushed to his head. Zaynon's female guests sat with the top buttons of their blouses undone, allowing the material to fall loosely open, framing the enticing descent between their breasts.

Their heads tilted slightly to display the clean white line of their necks. Jamil's eyes roamed the soft line of their throats, until perspiring, his eyes and heart fell further downwards into the dark luxurious warmth between the openings of their blouses to be enveloped by their breasts. As he caught a faint glimpse of the outlining of their panties against the material of their dresses, his blood pulsated wildly.

This complete break with conservative female taboo drove Jamil, the young professor, wild. He no longer discriminated between the young or the old, and he would have said yes to anyone and slept with them all, particularly the older women, who were far more coquettish than the young. He could have never had such freedom with the native women.

Zaynon was from a very poor family whose existence depended on a small plot of land which offered little produce or wheat. They lived in a medium size house with a single, large room. As was common with villagers at the time, they shared the room with their animals--a donkey, one cow and three goats. Despite the conditions, Zaynon the son of a peasant, was very ambitious, energetic and not resigned to this restrictive existence as he searched for fulfillment beyond the experiences of his family and village.

He enjoyed and had a great deal of talent for excavation. Beginning when he was fourteen, he spent the three months of summer vacation each year with foreign

excavation teams, working at various sites. A good number of these teams were excavating close to his village.

One in particular, *Umm Qais*, attracted many international teams. It was here that Zaynon was most regularly drawn. He would use the recommendation and good name he had earned from the first group to earn him a place in the next team. With this system, he never ran out of work and continually moved through successive teams. Owing to his industry and dedication, he was invited to excavate large and important sites.

After finishing secondary school he worked longer hours with these teams. One day his future adopted father visited one of these sites while Zaynon was at work. Upon noticing him, he took an immediate liking to the ambitious young man who, since working with these international teams, had learned fluent spoken English as well as displayed a remarkable aptitude for Western etiquette.

Captain Dexter, the old archeologist, was impressed with his etiquette and overwhelmed with his dedicated and spirited work ethic. Most importantly, he saw in Zaynon elegance and pride that reflected the English aristocracy. The English gentleman would frequently visit the sites to observe the young man. On a day fateful to Zaynon's future, he made the suggestion that he would very much like to adopt Zaynon and send him to England where he could continue his education in archeology.

The ambitious young man took little time in accepting. When his family was told, they erupted in overwhelming joy. They had never dreamed it would be possible for their son to leave their poor family home and backward society and have the opportunity to study in the West. There was no doubt in their minds that their son would one day become an important figure in the upper social circles. He would be the one to lead them out of their poverty and backwardness into a new age of means and enlightenment.

Since Zaynon was too old for legal adoption, Mr. Dexter became his patron, and they eventually developed a strong personal bond. The English archaeologist informed the young man of his desire to supervise and guide him throughout the next two years in order to give him personal attention and practical experience. Then he would go to England to study formally at the Oxford University. Along with a monthly stipend, he would receive his room and board in the large house. In return,

the young chap would be responsible for the upkeep of the premises. Zaynon and his family could hardly contain their joy at the offer.

Mr. Dexter was in his early fifties and looked much younger than his real age due to his excellent diet and his daily physical exercise. He was well known all over the Western World in the field of archeology, and his opinions were widely respected. He had written several books that were used as references by students of archeology. He was a widower with one unmarried son who had migrated to Australia, and one daughter who had married and was living in America. His lady-friend worked in the archaeological department of the British Museum in London. She visited Mr. Dexter for two months each year as his guest, on a half-working, half-vacation loan from the museum. In return, he would spend one month each year in England with her.

All the members of the British community who frequented Mr. Dexter's house, including the Ambassador himself, would treat Zaynon, Jamil and Abboud Mahdi as equals, infusing their speech with politeness, respect, interest and courtesy. The three men had earned a great deal of respect among the expatriate community. Major Antonio Davidson, as they all called him, an ex-major recently retired from the British Army who had been serving for the past two years as head of security at the British Embassy in Amman, was the single exception to their jolly band of brothers. He was an elderly man of about sixty-five years of age. The major was pompous, false, arrogant, and talked to the three young men in a rude, haughty and overbearing manner, treating them as servants, unable to relinquish the elitist demands of a British blue-blood, considering them second-class citizens.

As Jamil was informed, the Major's single attempt at marriage had failed after only nine months, and he remained divorced, refusing to take another wife or even a girlfriend. He was a true and living picture of the British-Raj and its uninspired colonialism, a relic resisting the death of its generation. His mustache shone with the wax and attention it received as he continually rolled it between two fingers, developing it to a fine point which looked more like a perch for birds.

Betsy, that crafty hussy! Since the day Jamil had set eyes on her, she had him gripped in body and soul every time she would come near him. This sexual rage of a monster that had for all this time dwelt dormant within him would violently kick and punch his insides, wanting to attack and ravish the beautifully buxom Betsy. And didn't she know it! How she would dangle the bait! Adjusting her stockings, baring her breasts, breathing close to him, teasing, daring that monster to break free from the cage and come all over her! Romeo's imagination was frenzied. Memories rolled freely and stirred dangerously within him.

Every time she stood before him and allowed him to fall into the rivers of her eyes, his heart was wracked with fire, his eyes boiled and leapt from their sockets. All his body responded manfully to her gaze. When she entranced him with her magical, sonorous voice, he felt an uncontrollable desire to pull her down and make love to her before everybody, even if he had to pay with his freedom as the price for it.

This woman was fully aware of the strains she put her lover through when talking to him. She understood the unique and special charm that she could weave around him, provoking his emotions and inflaming his feelings. She would exaggerate her actions, flashing a more tempting glimpse of her neck and breast, leaving her lips parted slightly. Jamil heard her words only as a polite cover that weakly disguised her real demand that he take her to bed and quench the fire in both their hearts.

Every time the young lover was alone with her, usually only for a few minutes, he pressed her for her number and address and petitioned for a date or an opportunity to spend some time alone. He tried to snare her with his declaration of love, saying that a beautiful image of her remained firmly anchored in his mind, and his dreams never relinquished the picture of her body. In fact these dreams had obstructed any chance of sleep for many of the past nights.

One night he told her, "I would gladly pay ten years of my life for a night between your arms." Her reply was a sexy, cynical laugh that served to further inflame his blood and mind, causing him to lose control of himself.

"Many men have given up and paid far more than you have offered. Other men have paid fifteen years of their life and some even paid twenty."

Jamil answered, his entire body twisting with the urgency of his reply, "I will pay all my life for one night in your arms."

"Agreed!" she laughed and came closer to him, so he could have a sniff of her perfume to set him on fire!

Zaynon asked from his seat, "What are you both whispering about that I can't hear?" Then in Arabic he asked Jamil, "Are you trying to seduce her, and wrap her heart around your charms, you Villain? You Casanova!"

Betsy understood the Casanova quip and replied, "Don't worry about me, Zaynon. I can take care of myself!"

Jamil was extremely puzzled and frustrated by her excuses and lack of response every time he asked for her address and number. Never did she directly refuse his request. "I live with my father who is *extremely* conservative. If he thought I was dating a Jordanian, he'd kick me out. So I never go out with anyone local on a regular basis."

Jamil knew she was lying, because he remembered seeing her recently in a convertible owned by a wealthy Jordanian. As Jamil recalled, she was practically sitting in the man's lap, so he wasn't satisfied with her vague response. His heart was left to dangle between the fire of despair and the stars of exhilaration.

Every time he would release his frustration by stamping angrily on the floor. Like a wild stallion he wanted to neigh and snort in frustration, attack Betsy, pin her to the floor, and release the burning semen that boiled in his loins. His desires and dreams were acted out by the muscular and single-minded drive of the wild stallion in heat. It was always this animal-like ferocity that he felt.

The well ornamented girl did not walk but glided and danced over the ground. Leaving physical exertion to lesser beings, she was a cloud gently blown over the horizon of Jamil's vision. She freely put her opaque soul on display to him. Despite her young age, which Jamil understood to be only twenty-four, she held a high position in the British Embassy.

"Maybe she is the Ambassador's mistress?" Jamil said lustfully one day to Zaynon.

"Your mind thinks only between a woman's two legs." Zaynon was angered by the suggestion. "Anyhow, the Ambassador has a wife and children, and doesn't waste his time thinking of those stupid and insignificant things. He is not an Arab-pig diplomat. He is English. You understand? He is English, full of pride and dignity," he said angrily, gnashing his teeth. All his thoughts are purely directed to the service of

his country, and you discredit and insult Betsy's professional attitude and her own morals.”

"Oh! really! Is there a man regardless of race who doesn't think about a woman's heavenly attributes?" Jamil was deadly serious.

"Only the English." Zaynon's conviction was rock-solid.

"Your obsessive love for the English and belief in their superiority is puzzling, as I know you are fully aware that they are at the root of our country's problems."

"The English are not the source of blame, neither are the other Europeans," Zaynon barked in furious retort. "We're a bunch of whores and traitors who have lost our honor, pride, dignity and credibility.”

“Calm down, my friend,” Jamil said. “I am not trying to insult them. I know they're superior people in your eyes. I'm only saying that when it comes to women, no man is invulnerable.”

But Zaynon continued, “We are the catalyst! The English, the French, the Americans and the rest of the Europeans find in us a source of villainy, baseness, immorality and treachery. And they see us as mercenaries eager to sell our country and our people. They treat us, as we deserve, like desert insects, and we understand ourselves to be such." This truth fell like a heavy stone to the pit of Jamil's stomach, and he painfully and sorrowfully refrained from uttering a single word.

He was repulsed by Zaynon and worked hard to avoid his presence, reluctant to be humiliated by his demeaning manner. He even went to the extent of intending to repay the major for every insult he had been subjected to, but upon remembering his daughter Betsy, he swallowed his hatred and even excused him for Betsy's sake. Yet he remained amazed that such an unpolished and uncultivated man could produce such a refined, tender, sweet and charming girl as Betsy, who bore no visible mark of her flawed parentage.

Jamil was at a loss to explain this connection. In fact, he held a deep suspicion that he couldn't explain and yet was unable to exercise. Surely Betsy was not the major's daughter. It was impossible for her to be the offspring of this arrogant, rude monster. He was prompted to go so far as to reveal his secret suspicion to his friend one day.

Zaynon admonished Jamil. "I am afraid your wild imagination and sick thinking will one day lead you to believe that Abdullah Dahshan, is not your father and Aminah Dahshan conceived you by another man."

Jamil apologized to his friend and never mentioned the idea again, although he was unable to ever completely rid himself of its tarnished stain.

Chapter 11

Mr. Dexter cultivated young Jamil's company, for unlike Zaynon, his adopted son, he was well-read and well-suited to the archaeologist's passion for intellectual and literary discussion. In addition, Mr. Dexter offered to help him get a scholarship if he cared to continue his higher education studies in Middle Eastern languages and literatures while in England.

"Thank you very much. You are a rare man and I appreciate your kind offer," Jamil said, "but I prefer to go to America if I need to go outside the Arab World."

"Why do you prefer the United States over the United Kingdom?" the old man asked the young fellow with a big smile lighting his face.

The young man paused for a moment and said, "You know, Mr. Dexter, how much I revere and respect you, value and appreciate your care and assistance to my friend Zaynon. I do not want you to feel insulted and accused for what I am going to say."

A look of amazement covered the archaeologist's face. "I promise I will not!"

"The people in America come from all over the world. America is called a melting pot, and no person feels he is better than the others. But in the United Kingdom, people are arrogant and think they are better than the other people of the world. They also think that the blood which runs in their veins is purer than that of other nations!"

The old man laughed joyfully and said, "Not all of them, not all of them, my dear son."

"Anyhow, I have never thought to leave Jordan unless on vacation. I earned my degree to help my own country." Jamil refrained from telling the Englishman that he did not wish to go to England because of the manner in which it treated its colonies, exhausting their resources in order to build up its tyrannical empire, leaving those countries divided, torn and backward and keeping their people starving and steeped in ignorance.

America had not yet shown its ugly face towards undeveloped countries or started conquering, subduing and enslaving their people. At that time America's reputation smelled like the fragrance of original Parisian perfume, and was the dream and sanctuary of every deprived creature under the sun, the glittering, shining hope of

freedom and independence for every oppressed nation because of its hospitality and democracy. That was before it became a state which promoted, sponsored, nurtured and organized terrorism. This was all before the country faced a moral crisis and while it was still seen as a positive and guiding hand in world development.

"Am I to understand you correctly, Jamil, that you wish to stay in Jordan and settle down here for good?" asked Mr. Dexter.

"Of course," Jamil said, rather surprised at the question. "Jordan is my country, my home and my first love! She is my sweetheart. I idealize her. She is second only after God. It is everything in my life. Just exactly how would I be able to leave it? The only way would be if I were forced to do so!"

No doubt the archaeologist was rather awestruck at the young man's forthright reply. For a moment he gazed at him as if this patriotic young man were one of his finds.

"Well, Jamil, that's terribly decent of you. I admire your thinking and courage."

The brave young man was wondering whether the man was being serious or sarcastic. You just did not know where you stood with Mr. Leonard Dexter.

"Wouldn't you agree, Mr. Dexter," Jamil asked, "that we owe it to ourselves and to our country to seek to modernize it and develop the society in which we live, rather than trying to run away from it?"

"I meant to say, that you go to England or elsewhere for your higher education, Jamil, and then of course, return to your country. Without a doubt I admire your loyalty. I really do. Believe me. "

There was no doubt that Mr. Dexter repeated this to clear up any misunderstanding that Jamil might be having before he continued. "For instance, I love my country very much. It was the love and the glory of England that brought me to Jordan."

"I am sorry. I don't understand you." Jamil said.

"You see, my government asked me to go to Jordan to help develop the Antiquities sector. You know, Jamil, I could have turned it down and gone to an advanced country and made more money, but I respected the government's wishes and came here."

"But remember, Mr. Dexter, there is a big difference between the rulers of your country and the rulers of mine. In your country the educated people are treated

with great respect and looked at as guides and leaders of the country. Here they are seen as burdens because the government has to find them jobs. This government prefers us, the educated, to stay away from Jordan, so they can have all the wealth of the country for themselves without anyone's saying a word."

Mr. Dexter diplomatically avoided further discussion of politics, but he understood what Jamil was trying to say and asked, "Do you know anyone in America? Do you have relatives, friends, or even an acquaintance there?"

Jamil was a little surprised at this quick change of subject, but he replied nonetheless, "No I don't know anyone there at all."

"If you ever think of going there to study or for any other reason, I have a very close friend who teaches at the University of Southern California. He could help you considerably, I'm sure."

"That's very kind of you, Sir! I'm still hoping that the university here may give me a job, so I don't have to seek employment in another country!"

"I hope so, Son," the wise man said with a most sincere and sympathetic look. "I am sorry to see the disappointment on your face, because it seems especially sad at this, the starting point of your career."

At that moment Jamil remembered something, and a smile suddenly spread across his worried face. Licking his dry, chapped, hungry lips he proclaimed, "Now come to think of it, I have met a person from California!"

"What do you mean? How? Where?"

"During one of my frequent visits to the literary club which is affiliated with the American University in Cairo, I met an American gentleman who was of Palestinian descent. He was about my age and was attending a six-week cultural exchange seminar. At that time he offered me the opportunity to go to America with him."

"When was this, young man?"

"About five months ago. I was preparing myself for my return to Jordan at the time."

"Remember, my son. In order for an American to sponsor you, he must have the means necessary to do so. He must be in a very lucrative position and be well established financially. He must have good bank investments and possess property and assets."

Jamil smiled and said, “From what I understand, he and his family are multi-millionaires. They own many companies and several establishments in the state of California. He offered me a job with an excellent salary and opportunity for advancement in a short period of time with any one of his many companies. He wanted me to sign a contract with him right away. He said my salary would double after just one year of employment with him if I show diligence, patience and perseverance.”

“Oh! That was very nice!” Mr. Dexter exclaimed. After a brief pause, he asked. “You refused?”

“Of course!” Jamil replied, nodding his head several times without muttering another word.

“I am sorry to say that you have made a mistake, Son, a large one. This kind of opportunity comes only once!” said the man with noticeable disappointment on his face.

Jamil objected greatly to this criticism of his own judgment and loyalty to his country and himself even though he still did not feel completely satisfied with his own thoughts about the situation.

“What kinds of businesses do they own?” Mr. Dexter asked.

“He said they deal with almost everything that generates profits, from automobile sales to buying and selling property. They own gas stations, restaurants, insurance companies, retail shops, tobacco and food stores and other businesses all over the state of California.”

Mr. Dexter laughed joyfully and said, “They must be very clever people.”

“Yes they are. They are legendary! He told me I could pick and choose the company and the city I liked!”

“He must have liked you very much to offer you that kind of employment.”

Jamil laughed and said, “The truth is that he asked me numerous questions. We met for only three hours or so. In spite of our very brief encounter, he really believes that I would be a complete asset to any company. I have no idea where he got that idea.”

“I believe he’s right, Son. You are a smart and hard working chap!”

“Thank you very much, Sir! Your testimony is like a gold medal of honor I shall wear around my neck wherever I go,” Jamil replied with the utmost sincerity.

“I anticipate a bright future for you,” said the old man, but Jamil did not comment.

Mr. Dexter called Abboud, the cook, and asked him to bring some tea and biscuits. When he arrived, Mr. Dexter asked Abboud about Zaynon and whether he would be returning from visiting his family in the village that night or the next day. Abboud answered by stating that he didn’t know.

While they were being served Jamil said, “Karum, that was his name, told me a very interesting story about his grandfather and how he built up the empire which was now theirs. It was amazing how he spoke of his grandfather with such respect as if he were the man who discovered America or the scientist who discovered penicillin!”

“He must have loved his grandfather very dearly. When we talk about people we love, we think of them as if they were miracle workers,” said the archaeologist.

“He went to the United States,” Jamil continued, “to pursue a higher education at a time when the entire Middle East sent over only a select few to be students. This was a long time before the creation of Israel. At that time it was customary to send students to France or England and not the United States. Therefore, a person from the Middle East, especially the Holy Land, was a rarity and was shown great respect and admiration! He was a tall, handsome, intelligent, ambitious and hard working man. He met a woman at the university whose father was very wealthy. She was the sole heir to his estate. They fell in love and got married!”

“That story is like the stories in the movies. He must have been a very lucky man!”

“Yes, he is!” Jamil said and then continued.

“Of course the father-in-law had his son-in-law work for his company. Therefore, he learned the trading of commercial and private properties and real estate. When his father and mother-in-law died, he and his wife inherited all of their fortune. Then he decided never to return home to live with his family. On the contrary, he brought his parents, his three brothers, his sister and her husband to America, along with any other relative who wanted to come. At that time, it was easy to travel abroad, because America’s foreign policy encouraged the mixing of cultures. It turned out that they ALL ran the whole show together!”

Mr. Dexter chuckled and said, “I still believe you should have accepted the offer, Son! This kind of offer comes only once in a lifetime.”

Jamil said nothing, but continued to wonder whether he should have accepted the offer after all.

“Since it was quite recently,” Mr. Dexter said, “you may still have the chance to get in touch with him and tell him you have reconsidered his offer and have decided to accept it and see where that takes you.”

Jamil could not help but laugh. “I am sorry, Sir, for my seemingly sarcastic nature, but I didn’t even consider getting his contact information such as an address or a telephone number or even his last name! He mentioned it to me but I didn’t even bother to learn it!”

“My Son! Did you think the university here would just welcome you with a Green Carpet?”

Jamil began to feel the old man’s slight sarcasm and said nothing. A period of time lapsed before he continued, “Anyhow, he insisted in writing down my full name, address, birth date, education and so forth. He also added that I would have the opportunity to get a higher degree while working for them.”

“Yes, you could do that. If you were a doctoral student you would receive many offers of scholarships, grants and work from whichever university or foundation with which you choose to affiliate yourself.”

“Anyhow, I will not leave my country Jordan unless all of the other possible roads of hope have disappeared in front of me.”

"When did you apply for a position at the university?"

"When I returned from Egypt three months ago."

"Three months ago? Haven't they replied yet? Why are you still persisting?"

"Because I know they have vacancies in my field of studies, five, actually. They were happy to get my application at first, but once the *mukhabarat* homeland security told them I was a member of a certain political party, they automatically refused my application. The law says that every government employee must have the approval of the *mukhabarat*. As you know, the university is a government establishment!"

"Which party are you a member of, if I may ask, Communist or Muslim Brethren?"

"Neither. In fact I'm a Nationalist. I believe in Arab unity. I am not affiliated with any religious group or with any political party. I do not trust their leaders, nor do I have faith in them. They work only for their own interests and care only for

themselves. The destiny of the future, the stability of the country and the interest of its people concern them not. I believe in the integrity, sovereignty, and the unity of Jordan and the entire Arab World!"

"Look, Son! I read somewhere that if a party member puts an advertisement in a newspaper that he no longer abides by the principles of his party, the authorities may stop hindering him."

"That is true, Mr. Dexter, but not in an institution of education. They believe I would affect the thinking of the students. Besides, I cannot do it. It would be a betrayal to my beliefs and principles and I make me a traitor to everything for which I stand."

"But Jamil, it is only on paper!"

"Even so, I cannot. I will not give even that satisfaction to the government!"

"With this attitude, I realize how impossible it is for you to get a job at the university," said Mr. Dexter.

"I think you are correct, Sir. Maybe you should start writing the recommendation for me to your friend in America."

Mr. Dexter laughed and nodded his head several times. "Maybe I shall, Jamil. I shall mention your situation and see what my friend suggests."

"Thank you again, Mr. Dexter. May God bless you and grant you a long and prosperous life. Zaynon was right that you really go out of your way to help people."

"Not at all, Jamil. Not at all, my Son. We should help people anytime we can, especially people with principles. Speaking of Zaynon, I believe he is a decent chap. I only wish he had your patience and was better read!"

"I wish that, too. In fact, he tells me that he never sees you without a book or a magazine in your hand."

"Reading makes a man complete, Jamil. I wonder whether you have ever tried your hand at creative writing?"

"No, but maybe in the future I will when I have time and money!"

"Yes, indeed. No doubt those times will be soon upon you."

"Damn this government!" Jamil exclaimed to himself, his mind still occupied with the university job. Aloud he said, "The leaders of the State think they are the sole guardians of the country and that all the people besides them are the real enemy. But really, Mr. Dexter, they are the enemies who plunder the wealth of the nation!"

Leonard Dexter, who by now was exasperated with this subject, sufficed himself with just a smile.

"Really, Mr. Dexter, all this concern for the people is pure pretense, they just..."

"Excuse me, Gentlemen!" It was Abboud the cook, calling from the conservatory. "A telephone call from London for you, Mr. Dexter."

Seemingly grateful for the interruption, Mr. Dexter excused himself.

Chapter 12

The patriotic young Jamil despised many of the ideas of the English. He especially detested the colonial policies that supported the idea of the superiority of the British Blue-blood. Due to his bitter feelings, Jamil had had second thoughts about attending the Oxford conference in London. He deliberated long over any final decision. Eventually his desire to attend overcame his repulsion for the former English overlord. The source of his feelings sprang from one particular incident which had deeply burned itself into his memory and was unlikely ever to be erased. Indeed each time he saw an English person, this unfortunate event was revived in his memory and filled him again with vitriolic anger.

The incident had occurred many years earlier in his homeland at the only public swimming-pool. This enormous pool was secluded in a large clearing in a private reserve outside the city limits. The reserve was surrounded by orchards and isolated by thickly leafed trees that fringed its borders. The heavy foliage protected the pool from the view of inquisitive eyes. A five-meter-high barbed wire fence circled the base of the trees, effectively cutting off all possibilities for intrusion by unwanted persons. Enough tables to seat several hundred people were scattered throughout the clearing and under the encircling trees. Whenever a large crowd was involved, the Jordanian government held parties at this swimming pool. They even allowed some of the foreign embassies to use this pool for their large gatherings.

Every Friday, a local holiday, the pool was awash with a leisurely crowd, but it remained quiet for the rest of the week unless there was a special occasion. A visit to the pool punctuated the end of each week for Zaynon and Jamil except at the end of every month when Zaynon had to go to the village to see his family and give them their monthly allowance. It was at this pool that the two friends had learned to swim. Now they were familiar faces and known by their first names among the attendants and by the old owner.

Zaynon would regularly take up the old owner in friendly and teasing banter. "You're wasting your life, Old Man! You need to marry a fourteen year old girl who will re-invigorate your taste and youth and provide you with security in your old age!"

The old man did not need reminded and was already searching for such a wife. He was fond of Zaynon and Jamil and would sometimes serve them free tea and cold

drinks. When they ate their lunches at the restaurant at the pool, he would serve them only the best and tenderest foods. The two fellows never went home empty-handed. This was a sure indication of his respect for them.

The atmosphere at the pool was positively warm and addictive. Even those who could not swim came to sit by the pool and relax in its languid, hazy atmosphere, taking pleasure in the happy cries wafting from the water. If Jamil or Zaynon grew tired of swimming, they played ping-pong on one of the tables beneath the trees. The pool was known for its excellent *hubble-bubble*. This fame drew a separate crowd of middle-aged men who took pleasure in a smoke whilst they sipped their heavily sugared teas. They, too, enjoyed the bucolic surroundings with the refreshing harmony of the green foliage and splashing water. The pool was open to men only. Everyone was expected to pay the set entrance fee whether he intended to swim or not.

Swimming trunks were rented at the pool, as they were still unusual items and not yet considered an essential piece of a young man's wardrobe. For Zaynon and Jamil to have their own suits was unusual, but explained by Zaynon's adopted father who was English. Being well acquainted with the delights of swimming, he had given several pairs to Zaynon as a gift, and Zaynon, in his turn, had offered a pair to Jamil.

At the time of the incident, Zaynon and Jamil had been cooling off beside the pool. They were lost among the social bustle around them. The men were relaxing in a number of activities. Some played chess and backgammon; others smoked in small groups; still others sat alone by the edge of the pool and watched the swimmers. There was no particular order to the events. The clearing was checkered by individuals or small groups self absorbed in their numerous activities. Isolated by the ring of trees, a warm bubble of careless abandon and good feeling prevailed.

Just then a young man's clear voice broke thorough this bubble like a knife. "*Harreeem! Harreeem! Harreeem!* Women! Women! Women!"

In a few seconds, more than fifty young men were crowded at the entrance of the swimming pool, giving a warm welcome to the *Hareem!* The magnetic pull of the call had also drawn many older men across the clearing to cluster about the entrance, adding their welcome.

The atmosphere collapsed as all eyes saw that a band of about twelve men and women, distinctively European with blond hair, blue eyes, and sun-red skin, were outside the entrance accompanied by some local military police. The group

represented the families of the English officers stationed in Jordan to train the local forces. A Jordanian military police who had come with the group addressed the crowd. "Please, brothers, clear the pool. Our good friends wish to swim. Don't create difficulties. They will not swim long--maybe one hour at the most."

The men were now massed at the entrance as if for a reception of some famous personage, Zaynon and Jamil among them. Few people at the pool knew English beyond the odd word. But Zaynon, due to his English adopted father and his work with the excavation groups, was fluent, and Jamil was almost his equal. Zaynon pushed forward through the crowd to translate, and Jamil came as an eager assistant. But the British colonel spoke broken Arabic, and the two young men were not needed.

A swimmer spoke up in protest, "We spent our money and time to be here and this is where we are going to stay. Our English friends are welcome to join us, though."

"We don't want our woman to swim among the native men," rebuked the colonel.

Promptly another protest rang out. "Colonel, if you didn't want to lower your dignity, then why have you come with your women to swim and sunbathe in a public pool?"

"Surely, you weren't worried about public opinion!" said another protester.

The voices were silenced by the local military police that knocked the two men down.

Zaynon protested in English, hoping to sway the demands of the English speakers. "This is unfair! You can't do this in your own country!"

The group was oblivious to his call and insisted that the native men must leave at once. The local officer entered the argument. "There are women here and you cannot see them in their swimming costumes."

"If they don't want to be seen by us, why do they come to a public swimming pool?" Jamil shouted.

"Shut your mouth, dumb Jackass! Don't argue!" The M.P. approached Jamil glowering. "If you resist our orders, you will be beaten and thrown outside the fence!" he said as he raised his fist to threaten Jamil.

Two older swimmers intervened and begged the M.P to refrain from violence and appeased him by acceding to his demands. The M.P. calmed down but fired off one final rebuke, "Don't forget they are our masters!"

“No, Sir,” replied Zaynon. ”I didn't forget.”

Jamil was infuriated. Tears of frustration jumped out of his eyes. "Did they think we would rape their women because of our rampant lust driven by the sight of them in swimming suits? Our own women do not cheapen themselves by allowing men to look on their bare bodies. Do the English think that by covering our women we believe they are inferior? Or that we are so hard up that we are salivating to look at or touch their pale, sick-looking skins? Foreign Devils!"

“Please, Jamil, let us leave them to swim! It is only for one hour. After all, they are guests in our country, and our hospitality forces us to give up our beds for our guests,” the pool owner said.

Finally the place was evacuated, and all the native men went outside of the fence, including the workers. The only person allowed to remain was the pool owner. Zaynon and Jamil would have left for the day, but their clothes were in lockers, and they were not given a chance to collect them. So they had to sit outside the fence with no protection from the burning sun until the swimmers finished.

The swimmers did not stay only one hour, as they had said. They stayed three hours and ten minutes! Only then could Jamil and Zaynon return and collect their clothes. Those three hours of waiting under the hot August desert sun, listening to the happy laughter and splashing of the men and their families in the cool water were burned on Jamil's memory in bitterness and hatred for years and years to come!

Chapter 13

Zaynon would usually visit his family home at the end of every month when he was paid his salary and could give them most of his earnings. He would go on Thursday afternoon because the working hours were shorter and Friday was a weekend holiday. The young man would spend that night and the following day with his family and return late Friday night in time to start the working week the following morning. It was customary for him to ask Jamil to visit him on Saturday night to share and swap stories of events from the village and from the past few weeks. But one night Jamil was to stumble onto a situation that would permanently alter the course of friendship between the two young men.

It was a Thursday night and also the end of the month. Zaynon was expected to be traveling to his family and their village. Jamil, unable to pass the time with his friend, had taken the opportunity to kill some time by walking through the center of town alone. As the final vestiges of day were encroached upon by dusk, Jamil found himself passing the main street on his way home. Customarily, the two young friends would linger on the sides of this street, spending time together loitering in the shops, or walking around aimlessly, enjoying their friendship.

Jamil had just bought a monthly Arabic literary magazine, ironically now published in London, a direct result of the Arabic authoritarian regime's squeeze on literary pursuits which had seen the slow extinction of truly free opinion, when he was pulled up short by the welcome face of Abboud, Mr. Dexter's housekeeper and cook. Abboud was a very close friend to Jamil, a friendship embodied in Jamil's gentle teasing of the young man. He would wind him up by addressing him with the title of Mr. President Noumeri. The connotations this name held for the Sudanese fellow sent him into a fits of laughter.

Mr. Noumeri was an ex-president of Sudan who had taken power by means of a 'coup'. The coup was a traditional institution in Arab politics as a means of cutting the red tape of democracy and overcoming the inefficiencies of power sharing with the people. In the pitch of a moonless night, Mr. Noumeri collected all the gold and hard currency from the treasury of the Sudanese government. He then combined this with the moneys he had gathered by different unethical and crooked means from the

people during his presidency and skipped the country. Overnight, Sudan, one of the richest and best-resourced countries in the world, a country which could feed wheat and produce to the entire Arab world, was sent tumbling into the depths of poverty and recession.

The bright handsome Abboud took great delight in hearing Jamil refer to him in this manner, as the irony was not lost on this poor and polite worker. It tickled his sense of propriety and position as a servant of the family, and he smiled widely in response, his white teeth amplified by the surrounding dark, burnished skin. Gradually, in a display of bashfulness, he often blushed.

"Where is President Noumeri off to?" Jamil asked, with a big smile on his face. Without waiting for an answer he added, "The walls of the Sudanese treasury echo because the vault is empty, and the people's pockets hang limply with no coin in them. So who is your next victim? I hope it is not Jordan this time!"

The young cook laughed. "I'm going to spend the night at my aunt's house."

Jamil was aware that Abboud had an aunt married to a Jordanian who was employed in the construction industry. They were forced to live in a poor and depressed quarter on the outskirts of the capital. Abboud would find loving refuge at every opportunity in their house; he was always received with open arms, especially by the children.

"But Mr. Dexter and Zaynon would be upset if they found out you had left the house unattended during their absence!" Jamil was concerned. He pressed the point home and added, "Have you forgotten that it has been only three months since the house was almost broken into? I know you cannot be oblivious to the anger and disappointment Mr. Dexter will dish up if it is allowed to happen again."

A little over two months earlier, an attempt had been made to break into Mr. Dexter's house. It was spoiled at the last moment by a neighbor who chanced to be returning home late and spotted the two men trying to pressure the main door open with an iron bar. The two men took fright at the neighbor's approach. Dropping the bar, they leaped over the side fence, vanishing into the night. Since that incident, Mr. Dexter had instructed Zaynon and Abboud to pay rigorous attention that the house was never again left unattended.

Abboud quickly assured Jamil, "Don't worry; I am fully aware of this fact. Zaynon is home. At the last moment he postponed his visit to his family until next

week and asked me to spend the night at my aunt's house." After a brief pause he added, "He has guests."

"Fine; have a nice evening with your aunt."

The inquisitive young man was a little embarrassed at having put the polite, gentle cook through a cross-examination. He turned and continued his walk where he had left off. After only a few steps he paused, turned abruptly and chased after Abboud. He caught a brief glimpse of him as he disappeared through door of the bus which closed behind him. Jamil chased after the bus, waving frantically, and Abboud, sitting in his seat, was startled to look out the window and find Jamil running alongside. He raised his hand in inquiry, but Jamil was unable to make himself heard through the glass, and the bus pulled away.

Jamil wanted to know whether the guests were Europeans or local people, and whether they were males or females. Considering this news, he thought they might be Zaynon's relatives or his brothers from the village who made his trip unnecessary. Jamil was little interested if they were local people or even European males. But if they were European women, and he felt that this was a certainty, he was incensed, for it proved that Zaynon's pompous declaration about the sanctuary of his home was just a complex lie aimed at keeping Jamil from discovering the truth of the matter. Jamil felt driven to shatter the falsehood and reveal Zaynon's intentions to the stark and cold truth of reality. He was tired and disgusted of Zaynon's word games.

A deep suspicion itched at Jamil. Zaynon's refusal to allow either of them to spark a relationship or hold any romantic sentiment with the European women did not seem wholly justified. It was quite probable that the chastity and sanctuary of his house was just a paper-thin disguise. The fear of Mr. Dexter discovering a romantic interest between Zaynon and a female guest was most likely a similar veneer over the truth. Zaynon was not a man who would apply the prevailing social custom which considered that the polite, well-mannered and self respecting man would cultivate a female relationship only with his wife.

This idea began to ferment in Jamil's imagination, causing him to mentally chastise his friend for not inviting him to enjoy the company of those whose luscious fruits he would catch his friend consuming. He was certain that Zaynon simply wanted to gather all these women in his own isolated circle and smother them with his love. That selfish, greedy liar! He suspected that Zaynon may have been reluctant to free himself from his charismatic snare of any of these beautiful, perfumed, and coquettish

women. Who could blame him? Their allure and Western habits, when filtered by Arabic custom, re-appraised them as tempting, flaunting stars spun of sex and charm. Like the spring flowers weighed down with heavy pollen, they spread an infatuating film of seed and dust over all the men they contacted, and Jamil had been heavily dosed. He was infuriated at Zaynon's lies, which seen in this new light, seemed aimed purely at impeding Jamil's attempts to ensnare one of these beauties.

Jamil was convinced that Zaynon was entertaining neither local people nor European men. If he were, Abboud, as was customary, would have been required to stay and serve hot or cold drinks and food. Zaynon even avoided serving alcohol, preferring the cook to serve drinks to the guests. Abboud's dismissal was definite evidence pointing to Zaynon's complicity in privately entertaining an English woman. A new and offensive idea reluctantly cast a shadow over the angry young man's mind, and his blood boiled. It loomed large, swamping the boundaries and resistance of his native conservatism, sending his imagination into a delirium of desire. His native morality had no structure with which to cope with the image.

The jealous young man pictured Zaynon in bed with a naked girl, perhaps even now making love to her. She was probably the one known as Betsy, not her real name which Jamil had never learned, but a lover's pet name, an expression of fondness and familiarity. It was a name that Zaynon used commonly. It must be Betsy! Yes, she herself! The woman made of fire and lust! The woman who frenzied Jamil and caused his emotions to run amok! Betsy was petite, and her skin exuded soft honey and smelt of sweet cream; she was an irresistible, captivating and treacle-sweet woman, a dish of Jordanian ice-cream that begged to be luxuriously rolled over the tongue and allowed to slide down the back of the throat.

The image of Betsy in the arms of Zaynon, spurred by this fanciful and ferociously passionate image of her, pumped his blood violently until his heart throbbed, and his throat expanded. The lustful young man felt as if he were a slaughtered bird with its head cut off, its body, unaware of the decapitation, still running aimlessly in circles as the last vestiges of its life pumped in a glorious red fountain from its neck. Jamil's heart beat a heavy tattoo between his ears and temples, clouding his thoughts and muffling the sounds of the street. He imagined Betsy's naked, ivory body in Zaynon's bed while they exchanged loving fondles.

At this point Jamil's mind shattered with jealousy. He lost control of himself and started to jog, then run in the direction of Mr. Dexter's house. The people he

passed laughed at the sight, embarrassed by such an open display of emotion. His shoes pounded the ground until he imagined sparks and flames must surely set them alight. A brief moment of clarity burned through his stupidity. He laughed through gritted teeth. Why hadn't he taken a taxi? He looked left and right while continuing to run, but there were no taxis in the street. He cursed his idiocy, for his running had covered only a short distance. He was wasting time he could have used profitably to look for a taxi. From the center of the city to Mr. Leonard Dexter's home usually took Jamil and Zaynon more than half an hour, slowed by their leisurely pace and frequent stops.

Impelled by his imagination and without the aid of a taxi, Jamil covered the distance in ten minutes. He felt like a swollen balloon, bulging dangerously, and full of feverishly boiling lust. He wanted to see Betsy naked in Zaynon's arms. He made an oath that when he arrived, he would charge down the door, pull the two apart, and in front of his friend have Betsy on the floor and not let go of her until he had emptied all his imprisoned and frustrated semen between her legs, even if he had to spend the rest of his life in jail. At that moment the angry young man felt a surge of utter rage at the way she was trashing and prostituting him. It was too much! Right now he wanted to let loose on her the raging monster inside him.

Suddenly he was struck by a new possibility. What if the woman in Zaynon's bed was that old toothless one who was chasing him continuously, leaving him hard-pressed to avoid an invitation to her house? But even that woman would satisfy his suspicions. It would be proof that the chastity and sanctuary that Zaynon ascribed to his house was merely a pretense and ruse.

When Jamil arrived at the house, breathless and exhausted, the gate was closed, and no lights were shining except for the street lamp and a single light in a neighbor's house. Carefully checking that there was no one to observe his entry, he climbed the two meter stone fence surrounding Mr. Dexter's house. With very cautious and cat-like steps, he prowled around the side and found a light burning in Zaynon's room. He tried to look through the window, but the curtains had been pulled tight against the night. Searching for any small crack through which to spy, he found nothing. He heard Zaynon's voice whispering quietly, but was unable to make any sense from it.

He thought he heard another man's voice, but his fertile imagination quickly rejected this idea and replaced it with the voice of a woman. He went to the front door

and tried to open it, but found it locked. He found several windows unlocked, but metal bars guarded against entry. Some curtains had not yet been pulled, but none of them gave a clear view to Zaynon's room. He continued to circle the house and found that while the bathroom window was not easily accessible, it offered a relatively unobscured view of his friend's room, and the curtain had not yet been pulled.

Cautiously, Jamil climbed into position to look through the window. The view stunned him into disbelief. There was his only friend, naked, pressed against another naked man whose white hair and barely discernible features looked familiar. Jamil froze. His hands grasping the window sill were tensed reflexively, the sinews pressing out under the pressure. Both his heart and breath were arrested. He could not believe his eyes! He shook his head frantically several times, trying to clear the memory of the image and awaken his brain to the truth. He screwed his eyes tightly shut and reopened them. Then he squinted and looked very carefully, finally realizing the truth of what he had seen. His imagination had played no role in this.

Jamil's view was undisturbed and he was spared nothing. The two men stood out clearly against the light of the room. They unknowingly faced Jamil sideways, offering a full exposure of their situation. Zaynon was bent over the older man's back, holding the man urgently to him, their bodies pressed tightly together. There was no room left for any wrong impressions. Their actions lucidly pointed to only one conclusion. The skunk with both his hands firmly gripping the other man's waist had entered the elderly man's anus with his penis. The two were working to a steady alternate rhythm. Shocked, Jamil saw their lips moving in answer to each other, but was unable to discern what they were saying through the thick glass. He froze in his place, his eyes glued to the scene laid out before him. His body began shaking violently like a tender reed in the wind. The old man was pleasurably chewing, his eyes closed, reminding Jamil of his childhood when he had seen a male donkey riding his female donkey, and the female in response to the males' intrusion was chewing as the old man did now. Suddenly the man cried out at the top of his voice in climactic pleasure and was soon echoed by Zaynon whose cry carried over the neighbor's yard.

The demolished young Jamil had no recollection of his following actions, or how he managed to leave the garden, whether it was through the gate or over the stone fence. The shock that had struck him was beyond description. His senses did not return until he was far away from Mr. Dexter's house. When they did, he found

himself lying on his stomach in one of the dark corners of the street, vomiting, with tears flooding over his cheeks.

He overheard two passing youths, one saying to the other. "He is stone drunk."

"Some people have no respect for others and are oblivious to their own embarrassment! They freely get drunk, then walk the streets. It's an insult to my religious convictions; a slap in the face. It's disgusting," his partner replied.

After a short while Jamil's mind returned to the events he had just witnessed. With a horrified realization, it dawned on him that the white-haired gentleman had been the arrogant, hard headed, vicious Major Davidson, Betsy's father! The wrecked young man was in no condition to deal with this recollection, and his mind spun sickeningly. He thought and thought until he was about to lose his mind. What ungodly reason could have spurred Zaynon's interest in the Major! What he had discovered shocked Jamil's conscience to the bone, making him loath and despise his friend. Zaynon's actions hurt Jamil's feelings deeply and desensitized his views of the friend he thought he knew. The aesthetic beauty in which he saw his friendship with Zaynon was destroyed. . . and what was left?

Jamil came to hate Amman to the extent that he even thought about leaving it for the time being and going somewhere else--somewhere he could have time to forget what he had witnessed or at least try to forget it, and thus rid himself of depression and grief for his friend's soul. He just could not stand living in a place that harbored such actions between men! He was extremely distraught and weak-hearted. His clean mind and pure heart were part of his religious upbringing. He could not comprehend the idea of two men having sex together. It was an abomination! The mere idea made his skin crawl and his hair stand on end! This unholy event between his friend and another man did not fit Jamil's concept of love and sex which was supposed to be enjoyable and adventurous!

Jamil asked himself over and over again about those exquisitely beautiful coquettes, the nymphs from Paradise. Had not God created them so men could indulge in their love and charm! Had not *He* created us to be both merry and happy? Why would anyone abuse His creation by making love to the same sex, behavior to which even the animals do not stoop!

Chapter 14

Jamil felt suffocated until the moment he stepped onto the first flight leaving for Cairo! He could not accept the idea that his best friend, the brother of his soul, was homosexual. The mere idea made him want to run into the street naked. Alas! Seeing his ex-professors, his friends and the wonderful family he had lived with while in school attending the university did nothing to cure his mind of his friend Zaynon's seemingly horrible mistakes. He was still raging with hate and disgust! Every time he sat down to think, he pictured his friend and the Major committing the exceptionally heinous act, the greatest sin, according to his belief!

Exactly sixteen days after his arrival in Cairo, around eleven o'clock at night while he was still restless in bed, sleep not yet having visited his eyes, Jamil heard a knock at the door. His landlady, *Umm Ayman*, had received a call for him from his brother, Karim! Jamil ran to the telephone. His heart jumped as he anticipated the outcome. His mouth was dry, his body shook, and he was extremely afraid there was an emergency or perhaps a death in the family.

As soon as he gripped the receiver, he asked anxiously, "Has mother died?"

"What made you think that?" the answer came back.

"Because you have never called me in all the years I have been away."

"Mother and all of us are in good health."

"Thank God! What is the reason for this call?"

"This urgent matter cannot wait. It is good news."

Jamil's heart stopped jumping and he finally relaxed. "So, finally the people at the university approved my appointment," he guessed. "When do they want me to be present?"

"I am sorry to tell you, brother, that it is quite the contrary. They sent you a letter. Sorry for opening it. The letter is to inform you that they have recently filled all vacancies and do not expect any new ones to open in the future!"

"Those HOGS! They appoint only the humbugs and the hypocrites!" Jamil shouted angrily. "What's the 'good' news?"

"A telegram came for you from America. It's from the Barakat Consolidating Company in Los Angeles, California, telling you that they have sent a letter to the

American Embassy in Amman to grant you an entry VISA since they are sponsoring you with a work contract in the United States.”

Jamil opened his mouth to ask his brother about the condition of his grandmother, but his brother continued with his news. “The American Embassy has also sent all kinds of papers to you and a file for your physical and a police check.”

“Who owns those consolidating companies? I wonder how they knew about me. I never wrote to any American company.”

“Let me see...”

After a few moments Karim said, “The general manager named Karum Barakat signed the telegrams. Do you know him?”

Jamil laughed and said, “Yes, yes, I do. We met here in Cairo several months ago. It seems to me he was impressed by my charisma and my ambitions.”

“So you were expecting it?”

“To tell you the truth . . . no! When he offered me the job, I told him I had no intention of working in any country outside of Jordan. I received my education to serve my beloved country, not America or any other country!” After a short pause he added, “Unfortunately, in light of recent actions, it seems that the people in charge of the destiny of Jordan and its people don’t want anyone except crooks and thieves to be in the country.”

“What do you want me to do?” Karim asked.

“There are no flights to Amman tomorrow, but I think I can catch one the following day,” Jamil said.

“Do you want me to meet you at the airport? I believe the airplane will arrive around noon.”

“No, no; don’t bother. I will take a taxi; it’s easier.”

“Ok, as you wish. Before I forget, your friend Zaynon calls me at work almost every day asking about you and whether you have returned from Beirut. I always tell him that you have not returned and that I haven’t heard from you yet.”

Jamil could not and did not comment while fighting off a feeling of nausea and disgust. He was running away to avoid confrontation with his friend who was no longer adhering to morals which were so dear to him and had been impressed on him from his youth. He had no idea what to say to his friend. He had, after all, run away because of him. He told his family before leaving for Cairo to tell any friend or relative who asked that he had gone to Beirut for a prospective appointment. So what

else was Zaynon supposed to do but try to find out what was happening and where his distraught friend was?

Chapter 15

Saturday afternoon Zaynon pulled into the drive following Amanda's instructions, coming to a stop in front of a large house located in one of the most exclusive sections of London, typical of the architecture of the area some years past. Large trees stood protectively as though ready to fend off all evil from this home. They reminded Jamil of the blue hands of Fatima painted on the wall above the outside door of some houses in the rural sections of his homeland to ward off covetous, evil eyes! Green lawns stretched away from the house in all directions, with flowers bordering here and there in brilliant beds, planned with simple discrimination. Every growing thing seemed trimmed, and yet as appealing as in its natural state.

Amanda's mother stood in the doorway, a tall woman with a welcoming smile on her mature yet still attractive face. Short, gray hair framed her smooth, clear, English complexion. She had a heartier look than her daughter--a larger, more active frame softened by curves. Her pronounced charm came from a happy mixture of friendliness, warmth and good breeding with an instant appeal capable of putting people at ease.

"Welcome to our home, Mr. Mohtadi, Mr. Dahshan. Do come in." She shook hands after proper, but informal introductions and then received a kiss on the cheek from her daughter as they started for the living room. "Gentlemen, be seated please; you too, dear. I am starting the tea directly," Mrs. Hamilton stated as she turned to go. At the door she added quietly to her daughter, "I'll stop by the library door and tell Father you are here."

The Jamil and Zaynon stood as a tall, erect man entered the room and advanced toward them. Amanda stepped to her father's side and presented her friends. His handshake was vigorous, but warm. His voice was deeply toned and firm. It possessed the charming accent of an educated Englishman. Jamil was enchanted.

"Welcome to our home. It is my wish that you will feel at home here and will come often. I am glad Mrs. Hamilton and I are able to have the chance to return a little of the hospitality you have shown our daughter."

Jamil felt that it must be as obvious to Zaynon as it was to him that this man was uncommonly distinguished in appearance and bearing. His handsome head and gray mustache vied for predominance with his alert, wide set eyes of striking blue.

His head was crowned with a boyish crop of rather unwieldy, white wavy hair. Mr. Hamilton shifted his gaze from Jamil to his beloved daughter. "How was the conference, dear?"

"I enjoyed it ever so much and learned many things I hadn't known about Islam," said an enthusiastic Amanda. "I kept wishing you were there to enjoy it too, Father."

The guests concurred. "Yes, it was excellent. The lectures were at a somewhat high-brow intellectual level, very informative. Perhaps Miss Hamilton mentioned that the representatives were mostly Orientals, each representing a large or prominent university. Many new ideas for the modernization and progress of Islam came out of this assembly. It was unanimously agreed that if the educated do not take giant steps now to abolish illiteracy and superstition, Islam will continue to labor under the burden of backward, unenlightened approaches and an increasing fear of progress among the masses."

"Indeed, it is a beautiful religion," Amanda said. It is hospitable to the challenges of time. It flexes and adapts to all centuries and to cultures both ancient and modern. I had never thought that the religion was beautiful to such an extent until I sat in on those lectures. I am reluctant to admit that I previously had a deplorable conception of its practice." A smile spread across her face as she added, "The picture of Islam manufactured for the West is false and distorted." Amanda, enjoying Islam with new eyes, regretted her old opinions, for they had proven so wasteful.

Jamil stated adamantly, "I think we are to blame. The followers of Islam are at the root of this misconception. We distort its beautiful face and make it look ugly to others. We bring the tenets of Islam to life. We are its living exponents and hence responsible for its image. Its beauty is expressed through the hearts of its followers. Those of us who have the hearts of pigs and swine transmute its face, rendering it evil in the eyes of outsiders." After a moment's pause he added, "The rich Arabs, especially the men from the Gulf who now live in London and all the big European cities, are evidence and proof of the Western interpretation of Islam. It is a disgrace and an evil that these rats and dogs are brazen enough to say that they follow the call of the prophet Mohammad."

Mr. Hamilton interjected, "Many people, particularly those such as myself who are considered educated, know the truth about the religion and its teachings, but we only discuss those tenets that are counter productive or spoiled. What is of frank

concern is that, despite the open-mindedness of new scholarship, we remain products of the centuries old tension between East and West. Deep in our hearts we abuse our knowledge and intellect to support our own religious values. We still view Islam as a danger and we warp its meaning in defense of our own.”

Jamil could only nod in exasperated agreement. "Yes, the rest of the world hates and despises not only our religion, but all Islamic civilization. Our society, politics, culture and ethics are all considered corrupted by Islam.” Scratching the back of his head he added, “The modern West is fearful of a society entirely encompassed by religion. They believe society must be founded in the rational--not the spiritual. Religion in the West is for religion only. Islam is the backbone and the reference for Arabs and Muslims. Arabic is the tongue of the Koran. With the power of this language, the Koran is given body, a liquid fluidity to surge and charge the Islamic people. It is the keeper of the Koran. Islam is an imposing and hardened culture. It is one of the few beliefs that has both the will and the potency to exist for many centuries to come.”

“I am aware of this fact, son. I am well acquainted with your religion,” said Mr. Hamilton.

Jamil passionately continued to press the matter he held so close to his heart. “The West cannot change the course of Islam. It is a strong wall, a protection for our ethics in this world. The West is working hard to falsify and destroy it in order to reduce our resistance. It is the bogey on the radar screen which frightens Westerners and makes them incapable of sleeping soundly. Because have we depended so much on the Western World for the past three centuries, we Arabs and Muslims have lost confidence in ourselves. We have lost our identity.” Jamil emphasized the final word, as if it were the linchpin to the whole issue.

Zaynon felt no differently about the matter, "We Arabs, in the eyes of the Western World, are no more than a well of petrol. Their dependence, no their addiction to this petrol, makes them fearful of us as their suppliers or pimps. So they steal and confiscate our oil and natural resources. They scramble for strategic locations to fortify themselves in our lands. Meanwhile, we stand as onlookers, spectators in a game in which the prizes are our homes and our history. They exploit us as a consumable market, sell us as cheap goods, exhaust our money, and make our industry redundant by competition.”

Zaynon paused for a second and continued, "The money born of petrol made the Arab give up his country and forget his culture, his history, and his identity. Without these centuries old pillars of society, the Arab is divided from his values and ethics. When stripped of these, he is reduced to a trivial, cultural parasite. Our petrol generation is morally empty, but has the skin of a consumer. We are spoiled spoilers who have no national pride and are separated from religion and culture."

"I agree with you wholeheartedly!" Mr. Hamilton said while nodding his head.

"Before the appearance of that cursed petrol, the Arab and Islamic nations were burning with inspiration, nationalistic and religious zeal. But petrol was an idol that stole all this from the people and destroyed the Arab nation." Zaynon spoke his next sentence with careful deliberation. "Now every ruler feasts on his brother's flesh, conspiring against him for the interest and gratitude of the foreigner!"

This turn of thought sparked Zaynon's anger. "With the help of those traitors who masquerade as Arab and Islamic rulers, agents and racketeers for the West, the Western World and the Zionists were able to kill the idea of Arab and Islamic unity, while it lay infantile and weak in its cradle. They replaced it with regionalism, tribalism, and individual interests, picturing them as beautiful, clean, virgin beliefs still fresh and white, while democracy was crass, irresponsible, morally lacking and without rules.

"It is saddening, son; it is, said Mr. Hamilton. "Perhaps things will change for the better.

"Dictatorship appeared to be our only savior against a loose society," Jamil said. "The people stabbed the heart of unity and nationalism, discrediting its value, importance and truthfulness."

"Why did you two chaps leave your country if both of you have a good education and your country is badly in need of you?" the elderly white haired Mr. Hamilton asked.

"We left, forced out by the pressure of politics. The regimes in our Arab homeland are glibly oblivious of democracy and its people," Jamil answered. "Their own opinions dominate, reducing all others to obscurity. This encourages the brain-drain of clean, committed, intellectuals--especially those who fight dictatorship, bribery, and corruption."

Jamil gazed into the faces of his audience and saw that they were watching him and listening eagerly.

He continued, "These rulers breed ignoramuses, opportunists, lackeys and social climbers in order to reduce and counter their opposition, allowing them to steal from the people and skip the country, secure with their nest eggs in Europe and the United States. In the Arab World we have geniuses in all fields just as you have in the Western World, but they are latent powers largely ignored and feared by the regimes. Those geniuses of scientific dignity and pride are unchained only to serve as lackeys and agents to reinforce the power of the rulers and help them accumulate personal wealth. As these geniuses know that efforts to assist their country or offer succor to the people are futile, they migrate to the Western World in disgust. The West then reaps the benefits of their brilliant minds."

Licking his lips, Jamil added, "We suffer from diminishing power and are rapidly paling into insignificance. We are waiting for the blowing of a fresh breeze that will free us from foreign powers and the power of the present regimes, a breeze that will cure our souls from weakness and our hearts from the incapacities and failings of our governors. Our rulers jailed our thinking exactly as they jailed our bodies. They distorted the Arab nationality and unity until it was unrecognizable. It became an ugly old whore who opens her legs to receive any unwelcome stranger."

Jamil noticed a warm smile on their host's face, and a shy one on his daughter's. At that moment Amanda rose to help her mother as she entered with a large pewter tray on which were placed the paraphernalia of tea time.

The two young men were shown their rooms and given a quick tour of the house and grounds before dinner. Jamil took an instant liking to the large library with books lining two complete sides of the room. Over the fireplace hung a younger Mr. Hamilton with a clean-cut face and an alert sharpness of eye, an aspect now softened into pleasantness by the passing years. Comfort was clearly the keynote throughout that grand, old, well-preserved house. The expensive accumulations of many years of traveling and treasuring were there, one felt, because they had been chosen as part of the family for their contribution of beauty or sentiment.

The Hamiltons wanted to take their guests out to dinner to the same restaurant at which Jamil and Amanda had eaten a few nights earlier. But Zaynon suggested that he was more interested in a home made meal, a suggestion Jamil supported strongly.

"Whether in America or England we are always reduced to eating our meals in a restaurant. It would be such a treat, if it would not be a burden on you, to eat at home for once," Jamil said.

The Hamiltons gladly accepted the proposal. Zaynon excused himself on the pretense of wanting to walk a few blocks outside. But when he returned an hour later, he was carrying several bags containing bottles of wine and many other things to eat. The hostess did not say anything except to thank him with warm appreciation. Jamil was very pleased and thankful for his friend's generosity and thoughtfulness.

After a dinner gratifying for both its culinary excellence and pleasant conversation, they picked up their wine glasses and moved to the den. Here they knocked on the door of many subjects. When Mr. Hamilton began to describe his life and adventures in the air force, he was guaranteed an enthralled audience.

Professor Jamil Dahshan, the bookworm, awakened eager to get down to the library and have a better look at the collection of some rare, old, leather bound volumes. Mr. Hamilton had told him to feel free to choose any books he would like to take back to Oxford to enjoy at his leisure. He remembered that his host and hostess would be away at church this morning. He dressed quickly and was just coming from his room when the young lady of the house called up the stairs.

"Good morning, gentlemen! Come on down as soon as you are ready; breakfast will be served in just a few minutes."

"Good morning to you, Lady Hamilton. Why don't we wait until Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton return from church, so we can have a more enjoyable breakfast with them?" Jamil asked respectfully.

"My parents will return late. They are involved in many activities in the church," the daughter said. "But we will have lunch together."

The guests had been told the night before that Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton would be attending a morning service at their church, and that Amanda would not be accompanying them. The guests were asked to please feel at home in their absence. After a large and delicious breakfast, the young hostess offered to take them on a closer inspection of the greenhouses. Jamil begged off and headed for his favorite spot. He

lost himself amongst the shelves of enchanted rare editions and had no idea of the passage of time.

When he had chosen two books, he came out of the library. With his mind on the printed word, he turned the wrong way and entered a hall that was unfamiliar to him. Just as he was about to retreat, he discovered the source of the soft glow in the hallway to be a light over a huge tapestry hanging on the wall before him. The hall was bare except for the soft carpeting on the floor and heavy draperies hanging on the opposite wall. A Queen Anne chair stood in front of these drapes across from the lighted piece of art.

Jamil stepped in front of this masterpiece of French craftsmanship and was so overwhelmed by the great beauty of color and texture that he had to lower himself into the chair before his weakening knees gave out. He gently bent and sat down. His eyes moved to the tapestry and feasted upon a scene depicting a garden of spacious lawns and willowy, drooping trees.

In the back-ground near a patch of blue water, a white swan serenely floated. In the foreground to the left of the viewer was a vine-covered lattice set over a stone walkway from which lavender flowers hung. Stone paths led in and out from left and right of the foreground. Several figures were on the lawn. A woman sat under the trees with a small boy bending to her inquiringly, and a man sat facing the strip of water a short distance from them both.

A group of three women standing half-profile in the middle of the scene seemed to be on their way to the drooping shade beyond. Two held parasols against the sun. The third, however, had only her large frilly, flower bedecked hat that matched her period dress. The threesomes' hair hung in long curls and ringlets about their shoulders.

The main focus of the scene was a single dominating figure. Jamil felt she must have been conceived through great love. Her beauty was magnificent, inspiring, and provoking. She stood facing front center as though returning from the lake or responding to a call. Her hair, parted in the center, fell in smooth, silky, black abundance to her shoulders. It was well contained and yet had an organic and undefined expression of freedom. This, Jamil discerned, was the overall impression of the whole figure.

Her gown, a rich shade of wine red, gave off life and a striking vibrancy against the pastel of the whole scene. Her long smooth neck held a string of pearls of startling

iridescence against her faintly dusky skin. The heavy damask of her dress clung excitingly at the bodice and waist, and the low neckline revealed the slow, rich rise and curve of the ripeness of her breasts. Her eyes were dark reflections of deep sensitivity, set wide beneath the thick languid lashes. One hand was quietly hidden behind the folds of her skirt, suggesting arrested motion. The long tapering fingers of her other hand grasped a long-stemmed rose of the purest white. Her face expressed neither happiness nor sadness.

Jamil felt his weakness grow heavier as her hauntingly familiar face searched and stirred his memory. As he sat looking into her face, framed as it was by the lavender and green of the arbor and the blue sky above, he momentarily glimpsed the Madonna—his Madonna in Jordan--her white rose symbolically enforcing her purity, her love, her child. Now her full sensuous mouth teased him with an imperceptible smile and the feminine droop of her shoulders begged to be held. He stepped into her world and stood in front of her, aching to hold her, to possess her, only to find leaden arms frustrating his desires. He saw her eyes fill with tears. His heart hadn't been so heavy with pain and agony since a time long ago. She mustn't see his tears for it was his job to comfort her and make her happy.

No one heard his quiet words, as he spoke to her in a voice overflowing with sadness and adoration. "You must not cry! For you are the most beautiful and the most loving woman in the entire world. You are the one I have searched for, the only one I have ever loved and adored. Wherever I have gone you have been in my heart. I just smelled your rose, the world's most heavenly fragrance. You picked it from the bush outside your bedroom window, didn't you? It is still there, then."

Jamil closed his eyes with severity, and a shower of tears covered his cheeks and skin. He continued. "Did it bloom for you because I wished the summer rains to fall on it? Does it still scent your room, your sanctuary from life, from me, after Father died? It is a room of enchantment for me, but, one in which I feel an outsider. It was forever his world and will be to the end of time. Do you know how I love you and yearn to have your tender arms around me and long to find comfort in your rare smile?"

Once again tears washed down his face. "You watched me at play and your beautiful face radiated love to me. Your tempting body leaned toward me in loving concern. Was it only because I was a living image of him, the one who was lost to you forever? I believe I loved best the times you told me stories of our Prophet, and all

about Allah and his word in our Holy Koran. Your sweet low voice carried words of love so tenderly. Will you repeat them to me again some day? Will you?"

Jamil had slid from the chair onto his knees, sobbing hysterically, "Oh Mother! Mother, help me! Please help me! I am desperate!" His vision blurred with the endless tears running from his eyes. As he looked up into the face before him, he could see a look now of tender compassion falling on him, a look he realized with a dawning clarity, he had carried with him as one part of a two part love since the days of his childhood, now so long ago, so very long ago.

Chapter 16

The lonely, tormented Jamil recalled now his hard and unhappy childhood. He remembered his father's death. He had been five years of age when his father departed this world. Father had left his heirs an estate that would provide a good life from its income until such time as the boys would be old enough to work. He had left behind him a decent amount of land. Some plots were located close to home and others farther away in the vicinity of the capital. As a result of an increasing population, these latter plots had become the site for houses, shops, and even commercial districts for the growing city. He also had left them acres of vineyards which had become desirable residential areas for new homes. The value of these properties would have provided a comfortable and even luxurious life if the property had not been looted, stolen, and confiscated!

Despite his father's early death, the security offered by this property insured Jamil and his family against any ill-luck. But in an event that was to cast an influential and brooding shadow over his younger years, they had lost possession of most of the land less than two years after his father's passing. Father's three brothers had divided the estate among themselves, giving the widow and her children only one fourth of it. Later she was forced to sell that portion to them in order to feed her children. The three uncles had obtained the land by abusing local regulations and duping government officials.

Shortly after Jamil's father's death, the government had instigated a program to officially register the names of all land-holders. Previously no such record had existed. As there were no newspapers and few literate people, the program was announced by word of mouth. A Department of Lands and Surveying was created to put the program into effect, and roving government officials were charged with establishing property boundaries for the entire East Bank of Jordan. The officials would take testimony from each land owner and two witnesses that the land they worked was indeed their own property. The three uncles, two acting as witnesses, testified to owning their dead brother's land when approached by an official.

The uncles received documents that certified their ownership of the land. Six months of grace was allowed for any objections. Since the widow was busy feeding and providing for her children and no one cared enough to come and inform her, she

remained unaware of these events. Not until five years had elapsed did she find out about these regulations and appeal to the courts! The magistrate was not in a position to help, but advised her to seek council and accept the decision of the family's wise and older members.

The brothers did not stop with stealing Father's land. They even stole his two most precious possessions which he had treasured almost as much as his wife and children: *Al-Mazuneh*-glamorous, charming beauty queen-a famous, pedigreed thorough-bred mare which was more unusual at that time in the city of Salt than a Rolls Royce automobile is today, and his rare German rifle for which he had paid a large sum of gold.

Jamil's mother's injustices were further compounded when the "wise" and "distinguished" members of the family ruled that the actions of the brothers were just, and that she should exalt Allah, glorify His prophet and praise the Sultan that they were generous, because they could have taken everything. The "wise" members concluded, "It is unjust for a man to own a large amount of land while his brothers remain poor. It is not the teaching of our good and righteous faith."

Another added, "Your husband was a great man and an asset to the family. No one can deny that. But he has died and gone. May Allah grant him mercy and enter him into paradise. His brothers are a support and strength to your family!"

The young widow had then cried out her supplication, "Oh Allah, my land has been stolen by unjust men! Please compensate me by giving me righteous and just children and by providing them with a good education so that my poverty will be alleviated and my heart will once again be filled with happiness."

Jamil remembered the traumatic grief that enveloped the family as a result of these shameful and disgraceful events. His mother would often close the door of their house, gather her children to her and weep heavily. Her children shared their mother's grief and wept with their faces buried into her skirts. This torment could last for hours, and they were rescued from their misery only when one of their good-hearted and compassionate female neighbors, concerned about their widowed neighbor and seeing the door closed, would enter the house.

Finding the crying family, they would ask the widow to stop and have mercy upon both herself and her children. They accused her of unjust behavior, pointing out that many good and just people fill the world. "Have faith in Allah," one of the

neighbors said. "He will never fail his oppressed and righteous people. "I am sure that God will make your children better than theirs."

Another neighbor added, "Just send them to school and don't allow them to become stoop laborers." These events filled Jamil's childhood with heartbreak and anguish.

Mother was a very religious and pious woman. She had great confidence and deep faith in Allah and His glory. She prayed on her prayer rug at each of the five official prayer times. In addition to this, she often prayed at midnight and once before noon. To augment her belief, she used her prayer beads to exalt Allah during the day.

She also recited various *surahs* verses from the Holy Quran in the fashion of illiterate people during her five times daily prayers and when she needed strength to face the evil uncles. She had learned these verses while listening to her father recite them during her childhood. She was also attentive to the fast during the month of Ramadan and the following six days. In addition, she observed two fast days each month on Mondays and Thursdays as well as one on every religious occasion.

The young widow had never been to school and hence had never learned how to read or write. This lack of education served as determined inspiration for her to guide her own children through school. She wished for them to achieve only the highest degrees and honors. Therefore she sent her sons to school despite the ridicule of the uncles. They called it an act of ignorance, insanity, and stupidity. These grown men had never been to school and scorned the very idea of a poor widow sending her sons.

They attacked her with derision. "Do you dream that your sons can become educated and find government posts? Stupid woman, how foolish you are! Why do you waste their time and allow their bodies to go soft, filling their heads with impractical concerns! You would be better teaching them to work in the field where they would learn a useful trade like their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers who were farmers before them!"

The iron woman remained insistent that her sons continue at school despite its costly burden reducing her to destitution. She was obliged to sell the rest of the land and the remaining animals. She worked in the fields for years--harder than any man--digging, plowing, planting, weeding, cultivating, and trimming her vineyards. She performed the tasks both of man and woman, father and mother. Many times she divided her own small ration of food among her hungry brood with their ravenous

stomachs. Patiently she suffered extreme humiliation because of doing the work of a poor man. But she was resilient and did not give up. She placed her dreams and her confidence in Allah, and He never failed nor disappointed her. Glory be to Him and gratify His name!

If Zaynon noticed Jamil's weariness and quietness, he gave no sign, but talked cheerfully about the Hamiltons' home, gardens and their daughter. Zaynon couldn't seem to keep a surprise to himself one moment longer, so he told Jamil that the Hamilton were all coming to his house for the next week-end, and that they had expressed great joy for this opportunity to spend time to get acquainted.

"Don't look so surprised. I asked them while you were collecting your bags from upstairs."

As the happy Zaynon maneuvered his car in and out of the creeping, late afternoon traffic, he expressed a concern. "I am sure Amanda is falling in love with you. Now listen! Don't get steamed up! I've watched her as she looks at you when you are busy. I feel sure of it."

"Well, what's the problem, then?" Jamil asked.

"It is just that I know how quickly you tire of a woman. I would hate to see her hurt," Zaynon said with a definitively weary yet tender tone. A silence followed before he added," Please, at least consider what I have said. That's all I am asking."

Jamil did not reply. He couldn't help being somewhat agitated and slightly amused at the thought of what his friend would say if he knew she was engaged, and there was no place in her heart for him!

Chapter 17

On Friday the handsome, young professor waited alone for the English goddess to arrive from London on the train. She was smiling down at him from the top step, and as she touched the ground, his arm slid around her waist. She looked up, questioningly, into his eyes, and he leaned down and kissed her on her cheek, ever so lightly. Holding her at arm's length, he confessed, "You wouldn't be able to imagine how long and painful this week has been for me."

"Wouldn't I?" she teased.

"To be honest, you've been on my mind and in my dreams ever since we last saw each other."

"Take it easy with me, Professor Dahshan," she said, a smile warming her face. "What were you telling me in your dreams?"

"I told you about my fondness for you and about how much I missed you when we were apart."

"What else did you tell me?"

Jamil, noticing her delight, continued courageously, "I also told you how beautiful, gracious, elegant, warm, aloof, compassionate, and strong you are."

She burst out laughing, attracting the attention of a woman who was standing nearby. "I didn't realize I was equipped with so many stellar qualities," she replied, tears streaming down her face. "Thank you, Professor Dahshan, for bringing it to my attention."

It seemed to Jamil that his somewhat erotic praise had stimulated her emotions and tickled her female vanity. "What else did you tell me?" she probed.

"Well, I also told you that you were a nymph from Paradise that the Almighty had sent to me as a gift."

"Oh, Professor Dahshan, your words drain me of resistance! The flags protecting my maiden fortress are being lowered."

"I didn't realize, Lady Hamilton, that in addition to your beauty, you are endowed with eloquence."

"My eloquence pales in comparison to yours, Professor, especially when you're talking about beauty and romance." She lifted back a lock of her hair and

added, "Remember, professor, that Western women aren't used to such poetic courtship."

"Perhaps," Jamil said, "your compatriots should study in our lands just as we Arabs study in yours. Western men might gain some education in the art of romance." They burst out laughing, simultaneously, and Jamil hailed a cab.

As the cab moved in and out of traffic, Jamil felt the need to impress upon the young lady his love and admiration of her. Thus he began to mildly compliment her beauty and amazing intelligence. "You look radiant today. That shade of green you wear matches unusually well with your own maddening coolness." She only smiled in return.

They sat at the kitchen table drinking the good, strong tea she made for them. Jamil remarked casually, "Zaynon wanted me to say that he was sorry for not being at the station. His work is extra heavy just now. We were both greatly disappointed when your mother called to say they weren't able to come with you this time. We will plan another week-end while I am here," he assured.

"Wonderful! The folks like you both very much. Zaynon is such a kind, gentleman, yet so intelligent and informative--a fascinating conversationalist. I feel so at ease with him, Professor Dahshan!" she confided.

"Yes, there has been an affinity between you two from the moment of your meeting. I saw and felt it, and if I didn't know about him, I would be very jealous," he lied.

Amanda's cup stopped at her lips and she looked, wide-eyed. "What do you mean?" she demanded.

Jamil's voice carried as much mock sadness as he could muster on the moment as he explained the 'tragedy' to her. "Two years before he came to the United Kingdom, Zaynon was deeply in love with a girl from his village, and they were to be married at the end of that summer. "After the harvest, however, his fiancé drowned while she was swimming in the river alone one day. Zaynon was very sad heart-broken, so he became very ill. His family was exceedingly worried and feared that he might die!

"Oh, my God!" the young lady uttered. "What a tragic accident."

"His mother was an illiterate, naive and very simple woman, so she thought the best way to rescue her son from his grief and make him forget his dead fiancé was to marry him to his fiancé's younger sister! When she conveyed her idea to her son,

Hell boiled over and Zaynon became insane! He gathered all members of his family, more than eleven brothers and sisters, and swore on the Holy Quran that he would never, never get married as long as he should live!"

"Why did he do that?" she asked. "Was he seeking revenge?"

Jamil remained silent for some time before continuing. "I know Zaynon very well, and I am sure he intends to keep his oath. He is still very sensitive about it." Jamil felt that his tongue had betrayed him and taken over his will since he had no intention of telling her all of this about Zaynon.

"I am very sorry for Zaynon. So sorry," she said, sadness evident on her face.

Jamil was extremely happy and proud of himself for being able to invent such a fictitious story on the spur of the moment. Silence pulsed between them.

"It must be very hard for a man like that, so gentle and good, to know he will never have a child or true love. It is a tragedy," said Amanda as she paused to ponder the horrible experience her friend had supposedly gone through. As Jamil watched her, he saw a puzzled look grow over her face.

"If that is true, then why. . . .?"

"You are wondering about your room, aren't you?" he asked.

"Well, yes, I do. I actually don't know, but perhaps he felt the need of something feminine around him to avoid a totally masculine world," Jamil suggested while turning around to face the stove in order to hide his amusement.

"Whatever his reason," she rationalized, kindly, "I feel marvelous to be around him, and I know other female guests will also."

Suddenly she gasped and put down her cup. "Oh, my God! I just remember something I said to Zaynon the day he first showed the room to me. How I must have hurt him."

"What was it?"

"After he jokingly commented that he had me in mind when he used those luscious colors, I said to him that I had simply assumed it was for a future Mrs. Mohtadi."

"What did he reply to that?" Jamil asked.

"He laughingly said the girls wouldn't like him since he was too set in his ways to adjust."

Each of them, deep in thought, finished their cups before the silence was broken by Amanda's philosophizing. "I have always considered true friendship to be

one of the greatest gifts in life where only friendship is the goal of both parties. My parents and I, of course, love each other and, at the same time, we are the very dearest of friends. I hope Zaynon and I will have a rewarding friendship between us."

"I truthfully hope the same! I believe, sincerely and faithfully, that no relationship in our entire life is more pure, more beautiful and more intellectual than friendship between a man and a woman when sex and jealousy do not intervene in their lives." Jamil said.

"I wholeheartedly agree with you!" Amanda replied. "No other type of relationship is more delightful and long-lasting than one such as you have so gallantly described."

"I am pleased that our thoughts lie on such an even plane," the young man responded while experiencing pleasuring chills of love and bliss running up and down his spine and neck.

"Do you believe in fatalism?" Amanda's question was abrupt, and Jamil was taken aback. She had offered no warning as to where her thoughts were turning!

"Fatalism is the strongest conviction of our tormented and crushed people at home," Jamil said.

"What do you mean?" She gazed at him with her glittering, beautiful eyes, and Jamil became lost in them as if they were two clear, quiet pools of pure crystalline honey full of innocence and love.

"Back home the ruler believes he is God's gift to his people and that Allah sent him to do whatever he wishes, even if it is to loot property and confiscate the country's wealth. He understands this to be his legal right, and he is never expected to entertain a guilty conscience. The tormented and crushed people, on the other hand, believe that the misery, poverty, and ill treatment rationed out to them by the ruler are their destiny determined by God. So they never question the ruler or rebel against him. We have a strong belief that our fate is written for us, *in al-lowh al-mahfuth*. It is firmly entrenched in our religious views, and it is a fate that we cannot escape."

The young man noticed Amanda was carefully considering his words and asked inquisitively why she had inquired.

"I was brought up since childhood believing that a human being was entirely responsible for his or her own fate. But since our meeting at the airport, I started to believe in predestination for the first time in my life."

"What changed your belief?" he asked.

"Our tour group was scheduled, as I told you, to return to the United Kingdom after three days. But two nights before that, I felt a maddening yearning for Mother and Father, my house, my friends, for London and for everything English. I felt that if I were to stay in Los Angeles one more day, I would smother to death.

"I went to the ticket counter and told the attendant that it was essential for me to be on the first available flight to London that very day for a private but urgent reason. She informed me that it was very difficult to find a seat due to the high traffic season, and that all possible flights were booked, despite there being several flights to London every day. We argued continuously until she was finally convinced to put me on the waiting list. Eventually I found a seat on the same plane on which you were traveling.

"Here I am meeting you again. Do you have any doubt that this action can only be God's will or predestination?"

"Why don't you blame our meeting on an accidental incident?" Jamil asked.

"I'll freely admit that our meeting at the night club was purely accidental, but this second meeting was predestined by God."

Jamil said nothing. He just shrugged his shoulders.

"I once read that an ancient philosopher said that human beings are like chess pieces; destiny moves us the way it wills, exactly like the chess player does with his pieces. I have forgotten the philosopher's name," Amanda said.

"If I recall correctly, his name was Epictetus and he lived in the first century AD. This is also indicative of Islamic philosophy," Jamil said.

"I didn't know that you were fond of philosophy! You seem to have the same passion for it as you apply to literature."

"Literature feeds my emotions, feelings and soul, while philosophy feeds my intellect. When I get tired of reading literature and have a problem seeking for a solution, I look for help in philosophy. It is the candle with which I lit my path for all those years in America. I underwent a period of hellish pain and suffering soon after my arrival there," Jamil said.

He paused for a moment before continuing. "I was living like a lunatic, to the point of losing my mind. Advancing on me and threatening my destruction was the potential of a cultural clash between America and my traditional views on values, virtues, ethics, idealism, justice and injustice, right and wrong, what is taboo, what is

halaal kosher, what is cultured and what is uncultured. “Back home I never bothered myself with these problems. Actually, you can say that they never crossed my path.”

Jamil licked his lips and added, "I used to read literature and enjoyed its beauty I studied philosophy, but it never entered my mind as deeply as I would have liked. Its intent echoed through my heart, but it never left a trace, in spite of my wide literary experience in Islamic, Arabic and European cultures. “

The young professor sipped his tea and continued talking. “When I arrived in America, I was still living under the influence of my strictly religious upbringing. I always saw my mother's moral lectures as if they were posters on the walls of my soul or a heavy cross around my neck, creating within me a personal moral complex.”

Jamil paused to savor his tea and consider his words. “This cross has been very difficult to unload. Just looking at a woman who is not close kin is considered '*harram*', taboo. Kissing a woman not from your kin takes you to hell. Sleeping with a woman who is not your wife will cause the earth to spin seven times in the after-shock of God's anger.”

“It saddens me every time you talk about your life back home,” Amanda said.

“I was nursed from birth with these beliefs. I neither debated them nor doubted their truth for the entirety of my twenty-four years at home, but accepted them unequivocally.

Jamil gulped the last of his tea. “You can imagine that when I entered America, all these beliefs were blown apart by the force of American culture. I started studying philosophy ravenously, finding answers within in it. I began to view beliefs in a new light. I became obsessed and maddened.”

“You must have suffered much more than I could ever truly realize!” she said sympathetically.

“Tremendously! Beyond description! Believe me!” Jamil ejaculated. “I desperately searched for a bridge between my old values and the discoveries I made in the New World. Without that bridge, my old faiths and convictions clashed dangerously against America when I compared the values of my childhood, which were the product of my mother and society, with the values laid before me in America.”

“No doubt the new culture was both a horrible torture and a welcome shock for you,” Amanda said.

"Yes, it was. I lived twenty-four years never having held a girl's soft hand, or even having talked to a girl. I lived all my life contented because I had no knowledge of my deprivation. And always eternal damnation separated me from women and deprived me of everything I desired."

"I'm sure you escaped that kind of life," she said.

"Yes, I did. I counted on Allah's compassion and His forgiveness on Judgment Day. I had lived for the promise of Paradise with its beautiful and immortal nymphs. In America I laughed at my ignorance and pitied my stupidity. I revolted against my beliefs and spat on the face of my values. I could do nothing but mock my naivety."

Unfortunately, their intimate conversation seemed to end just as soon as it had begun. Zaynon had arrived. He gave a warm welcome and a passionate hug to Amanda, quizzed her about her health, parents, train trip, whether or not she had met any interesting people and whether anything was new in her life. When Zaynon was satisfied, he announced that they must all get ready to have dinner. A colleague of his had suggested a Chinese restaurant that on top of having a wonderful menu also had reasonable prices!

While the hostess and the guests were socializing, Jamil was communing in his head with Amanda's image saying, "Oh Amanda! You are my beautiful goddess! My adored sweetheart! You are the woman of my dreams. You are the charming Goddess whom destiny threw in my way. You are fated to be tortured! To think that you will suffer because of your love for me is almost too much for to bear. I cannot begin to believe how cruel and wicked I am. How can my heart accept seeing you, you the owner of that great big and innocent heart, suffer at my will? I get lost in your charming, radiant eyes. Your eyes are a temptation, your lips a temptation! You have a fire in your body where there is lust and wild desire!

"Please approach my starving body with your feverish body and let our union satisfy our hunger and starvation! Let us calm the burning fires in our bodies and in our blood. There is a starving wolf within my being, and an endless thirst in my soul that will never be satisfied. Let me die in the paradise of love between your arms. Love is immortal within the paradise of your bosom, and in your arms is my fate and destiny. Your body is the most sacred of places and your saliva the water of paradise.

"You are a ravishing, intelligent, and elegant woman; you are blessed with all the qualities of a great mother and excellent wife. But I must confess to you that I have an abominable fault within myself. Understand me and believe me when I say

that while I will fall in love with you now, it is a certainty that in time I will only break your heart. Within me are difficult obstructive emotions.

“My mother wants me to return home and return for good. I am sure that one day I will. But even the attraction of her loving arms will hold me no longer than a few months, and then I will have to leave. I love my mother beyond belief, but I hate social bondage and restrictions. I like to live free in my thinking, in my behavior, and in my relationships!”

Chapter 18

Jamil had discovered that Zaynon was obsessed with horseracing; it was indeed an obsession beyond description. He used to spend a great deal of time, money, and effort in its pursuit! His house and office were always awash with newspapers and sporting magazines carrying results. Daily he would await the arrival of the racing news or drop into the nearest turf bookie to inquire about races running and those that were up and coming. Then the obsessed young archeologist would slip away to place his bets by telephone or in person on the day's favorites or outsiders.

That was just the horses. Recently Zaynon had discovered dog racing, and thus a second gambling vista opened its door for him. Jamil had been astonished by such news. After all, who could imagine racing dogs for money, dogs with their own fans and cheering crowds? His dear friend was one of them too! How strange and amazing!

As the dog track was so near Oxford, Zaynon was a frequent attendee. One evening Zaynon happily announced his plans for the three of them to attend the dog races the following afternoon, Saturday, and to the night club afterwards. He hoped they would enjoy placing bets at the races since this was his favorite sport and he often won. Maybe they also would be lucky. The three went as planned and enjoyed the race.

Jamil was amused by the sight of a pack of dogs chasing the dummy rabbit at the side of the track. The three of them placed bets, but only Amanda came up a winner each time. Her good fortune was both a source of amusement and pleasure for the two men. She said very little, but spoke softly as her sweet face brightened with a lovely smile, "I wonder if lucky people in track are also lucky in love."

A charged glance directed her words towards Jamil. Zaynon laughed at the comparison--luck in love and luck at the track. Jamil was plunged deep into thought. "What does she mean by that, I wonder?" he said, talking to himself.

"If you meet a dog, I mean, a man who is as faithful as a dog, you're going to be lucky," said Zaynon. Then he turned to Jamil. "What do you think, my little lap dog? Could you be faithful?"

"Could you?" Jamil inquired.

Zaynon turned somewhat pale, and Jamil thanked Allah that Amanda's attention was at that moment entirely on the race, savoring her first winning. After studying the situation he had just gotten himself into, the young professor soon realized how close to the edge he had come! "I mean . . . when you meet a girl and fall in love with her."

"I'm sure Zaynon would," Amanda interjected suddenly.

"It's in his nature and his character and maybe also a result of his upbringing. I've found him to be obviously loving, warm and kind hearted," Jamil offered, regarding Zaynon.

At this Zaynon licked his dry lips and shook his several times. Rubbing his hands together, he re-established his composure. "Thank you, Lady Hamilton. I'm proud to have such testimony on my behalf." He paused momentarily and then added, "If I found a girl with your purity, strong personality, elegance, and sparkle, I'd be sure to fall in love with her."

Amanda was all modesty! "This country is full of women rather better than me, I'm sure."

"Oh, really? Then please introduce me to one!" Zaynon responded with careless charm.

Jamil was sure that his friend's words had fallen all too easily from his tongue. "So is she an aristocrat and an intellectual like you?" Jamil quipped, jokingly!

"I'm not quite as refined as you think. Besides, the woman I have in mind is a cut above me in everything."

"Anyway Zaynon, think it over," Jamil said. "Perhaps you prefer to do your own searching. After all, not everyone likes introductions!"

"I think perhaps I'll do the searching for myself," Zaynon answered and felt at last his inner tension dissolving. Then the talk turned to dogs.

Later that Saturday afternoon as they entered the door returning from lunch in Zaynon's club, the telephone was ringing. Zaynon's smile abruptly changed to disbelief and sadness. The others remained silent, sensing some unforeseen unhappiness.

“Of course, Mazin, I'll come. Now be calm and think only of your mother. She has great need of you. Yes, I'll start directly. I'm on my way, just hold on!”

He turned and explained that a very good friend from his homeland had lost his father. They had been trying for hours to contact him. His friend, of a flighty nature normally, was in a somewhat bad condition to give comfort to his stricken mother.

“I am so sorry to hear that,” said the young lady as a cloud of sadness covered her face.

“The poor family must be in a bad shape,” Jamil said, “since they are foreigners in this country.”

“I am sure they are,” Zaynon said.

“I truly must go, and I know you both understand. Please make yourselves at home,” he called as he walked hurriedly to his room.

“How far do you have to go?” Jamil called, following a part of the way.

“Oh, Nottingham must be all of seventy miles from here. I'll make fairly good time though,” Zaynon answered.

“If it weren't for Miss Hamilton, I would go with you! I believe you yourself need moral support,” Jamil said in Arabic.

“Yes, if it were not for her, I would ask you to come with me,” Zaynon answered in Arabic.

“Drive carefully. May God be with you. Don't stay too long. Miss Hamilton and I will miss you,” Jamil said sincerely, but in English this time.

“Yes, we will, Zaynon, we will!” Amanda said warmly, with a sad tone in her voice.

“Thank you, Miss Hamilton. I will miss both of you. Take care of each other!” Zaynon said in English.

Looking at Jamil, he continued in Arabic. “Be nice to her. Don't do anything to make her or me angry! I would never forgive you! Treat her like our grandfathers and fathers used to treat female guests by respecting their feelings and not harassing them sexually!”

“Don't worry; I will not do anything that makes you angry, trust me!”

“I wish, I could!” Then Zaynon raised his hand and waived them goodbye. “I am so sorry to leave, but I must go. They are counting on my presence to help. They have no friends. I cannot disappoint them.”

“I understand, and I am sure Professor Dahshan does too!” Amanda said.

After the car had disappeared, Amanda asked Jamil, “What did Zaynon say to you in Arabic? I felt he was worried about something.”

“He is grieving for the death of his friend’s father and sad to leave us and go.”

“Zaynon has a big heart. I feel miserable every time I think of his tragedies.” Jamil said nothing and understood that she was referring to Zaynon being unable to have a wife and children.

Amanda suggested the two of them stay home and she would cook a simple dinner for the two of them. Jamil did not regret this decision, for he had found that she had learned a great deal from her mother whose culinary talents matched her gardening.

She placed candles and flowers on the table to lift their spirits and served a fine wine from their host's store. She did the dishes alone while Jamil, in true Arab style, contributed only conversation from the comfort of a chair.

Before she finished, he left for a minute to check on the supply of wood in the wood box and to see that all was ready for this evening for which he had the wildest plans and hopes. One of the young professor’s biggest wishes since his arrival from America was to sit in front of a recreational fire and watch the wood burning, the mesmerizing flames delightfully jumping, sparkling and flying into the air. The first year of his arrival in America, he had had the chance to spend a few nights in one of the state parks in Washington State. When he was vacationing with one of his lady friends there, he was able to acquire this exciting hobby.

Amanda put a white rose behind one ear, and pinned it with a bobby pin. Jamil, a lonely, desperate prisoner of his past, had no idea why suddenly, in this situation and at this moment, memories of his sisters and of the girls in his homeland suddenly awoke inside of him. He dwelt on the deprivation they suffered because they were robbed of the pleasures of life. They had never kissed or been kissed by any man in their lives. They were wholly subject to the prevailing social beliefs which consider the touch of a man who is not near of kin to be unethical and sinful. He thought of his widowed mother, who, after the death of his father, had never heard a compassionate or loving word from any man other than her sons. Her own need for love and comfort remained parched, as she could find relief only in a husband who was no longer there.

“Professor Dahshan, I would like you to do me a favor,” the girl suddenly said.

“With great pleasure! I would be more than happy to do it. Order me! But before that, I would like to ask you to do me a favor. Do you think you could lift the formality between us and call me Jamil?”

She laughed and said, “Yes, I will! I would like very much for you to tell me about yourself, your childhood, your family, your friends, your dreams, everything. Call me Amanda instead of Miss Hamilton.”

“I will be more than happy to do so.” Jamil said, straightening himself in his seat. “Back home, I came to believe that most actions can be interpreted as sin. Whenever you are involved in some public activity, you are fearful that there may be punishing repercussions for a mistake you blindly committed. The least mistake a chap or youth makes contravenes a taboo for which God will punish him.

“It is even a sin to attend a cinema and watch a religious film such as 'The Ten Commandments' or Al-RESALAH which is about the life and mission of our prophet. How can that be taboo? Despite this, I went to the movies every Thursday night with a friend, since this was my only entertainment apart from my literary endeavors. I waited patiently for that Thursday night all week. Can you believe that I was twenty before I saw my first film?”

“It must have been difficult for your family” Amanda said.

“I respect, revere and sanctify mother. I have never done anything against her wishes. My father died when I was a little boy and she was then both mother and father for her children” Jamil said admiringly. “She always considered me to be a straight youth and I embodied the qualities of a model child. Youths back home are specifically disallowed to smoke, drink, lie and talk to girls. I followed these tenets strictly. It took me months to convince her that I should see a movie. Even then, during her five daily prayers, she asked Allah to forgive me the unforgivable sin I had perpetrated by entering the cinema.”

“Years back, even in our culture, many people had the same belief as your mother!” Amanda said.

“In our culture, especially in small towns and villages, society is rigidly conservative. Its silent judgment always manages to overcome and condemn even those desires that you keep secret. But I had one safe pleasure to indulge in--reading. In fact, this hobby has since been a major motivation for many of my life-decisions. It was my only daily pleasure although it was considered odd. For the majority of people, deciding to spend their leisure time in cafés talking about daily events,

drinking tea and coffee, and laughing together is the normal thing to do. I loathe cafes and I despise vehemently those who congregate in them.

“That is why you are encyclopedic!” she exclaimed with sudden understanding.

“I read every book I laid eyes on and would read every day for ten hours. On holidays or weekends, with more time on my hands, I would read for up to eighteen hours! This was my only medication for loneliness and frustration, a medication most potent in the novels I chanced upon.”

Jamil sipped his beer and added, “I thought one day that I would be a great novelist, but I also believed that in order to be a great and truthful creator, I would first have to live the experience. As I was never able to live such an experience, I had no foundation on which to write my stories.” he said sadly.

“No doubt experience helps, but that is not enough. One needs other tools of creativity,” she said.

“Then Zaynon and I decided to migrate. I left for America a few months before he left for the United Kingdom. I told my mother about my planned departure only three days before I was to board the ship, only when both visa and ticket were safely in my pocket.

“It must have been a great surprise for your family” Amanda said.

“Mother wept and begged me not to go. She even threatened to burn herself, but I overcame her pleas, and departed on the most radical path that I was to ever strike out upon.

“The poor mother not only lost her husband but her son as well.” Amanda said.

“As soon as the Greek ship left the port in Beirut, Lebanon, I said a final good-bye to the Arab land. As we entered international waters, I felt severed from my rigid, Arab culture. I then considered myself to be living in the Western world. I cut my cultural roots and threw them to the sharks of the sea. And from the scars I grew new Western limbs. These new tendrils were to establish new precedents in my life. I determined I would live and act as those in the Western world are free to do.”

This time Jamil took a large gulp of beer and added, “I was emancipated from my bonds in that single moment. In celebration of this pivotal and momentous event, I tasted my first glass of wine. God forbid! Not the first glass, but the first gallon of wine I had ever had in my life. On the Greek ship we were served with our food a full

gallon of wine from which we filled our glasses. They gathered all of us stupid Arabs, a mix of nationalities, at one huge table. Upon this table they placed the fateful gallon. I was the lone participant in the drinking of this wine, and I drank boorishly and with a glutton's voracity. My actions were admired greatly by my colleagues and they were relieved to see somebody piss on tradition and conservatism."

"Oh, Professor Dahshan, I mean Jamil, this is too awful, too saddening!" she said.

"Back home we are cowards in the face of rotten and backward traditions and are cowardly before our dictators. We encourage other people to rebel for us, whilst we only watch and avoid real participation. Hence my actions pleased my Arab comrades who never allowed my glass to remain empty. In fact they urged me to drink faster and with more gusto saying, 'The canister is still full; why do you drink slowly? When you finish it, we can bring you gallons from the neighboring tables. The other passengers will be happy to offer them to us. If you consume it all and need still more, then with a couple dollars we could will give the waiter a couple of dollars to bring you a better wine.' Of course they never participated themselves.

"At that time, I was twenty-four years old and I wanted to compensate for the loss of those twenty-four years in one sitting. I am a little surprised that I have no recollection of events after that. But after a long and painful forty-eight hours, I managed to sober up, and was told that my drinking binge had ended abruptly when I slid under the table. I cried continuously for three days."

The young lady did not interrupt Jamil with one single word while he was talking. She didn't comment or inquire about the incidents he mentioned. The whole time, she was watching the changes of expression on his face. After he stopped talking she asked, "Why do you think you have no experience to equip you to be a writer? The hardship and suffering you went through is enough to put your writing on the bestseller list! The cultural differences you experienced by coming from the Middle East, where every behavior is taboo, to Europe and America, where everything is permissible, provide a tremendous wealth of experience.

She paused a minute, then swept her fallen bangs from in front of her eyes and added, "On one hand, I think you are lucky and should be thankful to have grown up in the Middle Eastern society. Because of their rigid customs, you became a great reader, and I am sure you will be a greater writer."

Jamil smiled and said nothing. The young lady continued, “I am sorry, Jamil, to tell you that in spite of the fact that you hate your society and loathe your culture because of its fanaticism, radicalism, backwardness, negligence, corruption and dictatorship, it is still much better than many European and American cultures! In your country, a person feels more security, peacefulness, and tranquility!”

“No doubt every culture has its good and bad points. Let us forget about everything now and enjoy a glass of wine!” Jamil said. Amanda smiled her consent. They relaxed in the cozy, intimate setting, happy and content.

As he mixed their first drink, Jamil was more than generous with the vodka in both glasses. Soon Amanda was soon talking and laughing in the easy way she could with Zaynon. She was seemingly unaware of the silent listener who had shifted his seat and was now by her side on the sofa, gazing at her hungrily.

When Jamil opened the door of his desires, he avidly ushered Amanda in and quickly made a move to follow. He paused as he passed between the door frames and looked around him. He saw the coquettish, young Amanda alone, standing before him contained by the four walls, and himself blocking the only exit. He felt as if this were his triumphal entry that would lead to a complete occupation of the British Empire in revenge for their years of rule over his own country. In that single moment, the empire weakened and disintegrated. The Empire had enslaved his people, tortured and whipped their liberal minds and crushed any rejection of Imperial rule. They had humiliated and killed his brothers who fought for freedom and pressed sufferings onto them.

Entering, he felt as if he were jailing the shadowy ghosts of English rulers, binding them with heavy chains and manacles, drawing their blood with whips until their bodies dripped with blood, exactly as they had done to his people.

The fragrance of the rose in Amanda’s hair reached his nostrils. He tenderly covered Amanda’s hand with his as she related an anecdote from her classroom. There was not so much as a flicker of surprise or concern when she turned to him and found her vision filled with the magnified closeness of his face. She responded to his lips as they closed over her words.

The prudent young lover was in no hurry. He knew the game he was playing and the rules were all of his own making. One more heavy drink should serve as the final blow to that wall of reserve she held so closely around herself. He was merely lacing his juice. He had no intention of dulling his senses tonight. He had never liked

the giggly, chatty type of woman he had found so many American girls to be. It spoiled any beauty or appeal they might have had for him.

The English Madonna's tongue was growing thicker now, and she would soon grow quiet and ready. She let her body slide down Jamil's chest until she was in his lap. He turned her around so that he might cradle her in his arms like a child. What a beautiful female she was! What a masterpiece of art the Almighty had created! A rose-scented temptress, Jamil thought as a thrill of excitement tingled along his spine. He was now looking into and searching the heart of the rose seated directly under his gaze.

"Amanda Hamilton is another Mona Lisa, but from the United Kingdom," Jamil said to himself happily and proudly.

Time stood still for Jamil. A sickening longing filled him, and with it a sensation deeper than desire kicked at his insides as he bent to her captive mouth and brutally searched for a response to his passion. She must respond! Women did when that cloak of purity, reserve and aloofness was fanned by the breeze of desire. His hands were frantically unbuttoning the front of her dress and pushing it downward over those soft shoulders. Danger! Soft shoulders! That's a good one! Wonder if they have those jolly little warnings over here.

He took her head between his hands and lifted her to him. As the blossom let loose of the protecting parent stem and scattered its petals down the gold of her hair, the soft petals crushed by the savagery of his touch filled him to a point of intoxication. The stallion was on fire at the thought of his true love. Why had she made him feel such a passionate need for her? Were her actions really sincere, or was she just acting?

At that moment the English virgin stirred and moved to the outside edge of his knees and he grabbed her close, muttering, "No, you must not turn from me. You must not desert me. I love you with all my being! My soul is craving to melt into yours!"

He lifted her and carried her to his bed. He had many times undressed her in his imagination, slow and leisurely, savoring and building slowly like the real lovers the world around. Now he almost tore them from her. He met no resistance from her still body and paid no heed to the moan of pain as the veil of innocence was at last torn away. Suddenly her body became a burning flame that passion had kindled and

which he alone could extinguish. This unexpected passion boiling her body to response, stirred him to a peak of ecstasy he had never before known.

Jamil was sure now that the virgin bride was telling the truth when she told him the first night they were in London that no one had ever touched her. Yes, she was a virgin; she was as pure as the snow! How triumphant and proud he was! He felt his pride and dignity had reached high to the sky! Was this not what an Arab bridegroom should expect from his bride and himself? Did he not deserve the purest woman for his first night of marriage? Did not Amanda have the ability to satisfy Jamil's Arab mentality? After all, ignorance and stupidity had no bearing in his upbringing and his cultural education, but virginity is a real gift! Isn't Jamil an Arab with an Arab mentality no matter where he decides to live, whether in America or Europe?

Amanda lay in his arms asleep or semi-conscious through the better part of the night. After sleeping a while, he would awaken again and again from rose-filled dreams to feel the great hunger demanding satisfaction. Her limp body, heedless and unresponsive, fed his appetite.

Light was filtering into his room from around the drapes when Jamil awoke and saw that his "bride" Amanda was gone. Grabbing a robe, he covered his nakedness as he ran to her room. The door was open and water was dripping into the tub, slowly. A large towel lay in a heap on the floor, a contradiction to all that was Amanda. She was not to be found in the house or the yard. The sun told the bridegroom, even before his watch, that it was close to noon. While her things were still in her room, she could by now be far away.

He went to the kitchen to prepare much needed coffee. He had just finished when he heard the door close. Jamil, the stallion, watched as she crossed the front room on the way to her room. He stared with disbelief at the figure of dejection before him; the face void of color, of beauty; the red eyes of hurt. Tears and weariness stood out grotesquely in the sick, ashen face. She glanced at him once, then immediately lowered her eyes. She walked silently past him. Without turning he could hear carpeted sounds of running. Later her door was closed gently and the house that was one man's dream come true, his paradise, was, at this moment, a torture chamber for its two occupants.

Jamil drank his coffee and stretched out on the sofa. As he drifted off, a fragrance under his nose reached into his consciousness--one of those little innocent

lost petals. No yearning, no unfulfilled desires, only a compelling knowledge gripped him that one day soon he must go home and see if all was well with his mother. He must be a real son to her once again.

Later in the day Jamil experienced a sense of well being as he walked in the fresh air brought through the streets of Oxford. Hunger finally drove him to a restaurant in the heart of town where he felt his body would not hold all his appetite demanded. The house was still silent and cheerless upon his return. Remembering the now empty wood box, he busied himself replenishing it with several arm loads. As he entered the house after the second load, the telephone was ringing. He dumped his burden on the hearth and picked up the receiver.

Zaynon explained that it would be absolutely necessary for him to stay over for the funeral on Monday morning. "You can't imagine Jamil, how important and useful my presence was!" Zaynon said. "The poor family did not know anyone except me in the United Kingdom." He paused to catch his breath and added, "They did not know how to deal with the corpse, where to bury it and the rest of the rituals. They were happy that I took care of it all."

Jamil responds, "Did you arrive on time?"

"Yes, thank God! Please give me to Amanda so I may speak to her."

"Very sorry, my friend," said Jamil, "she has just stepped into the bathtub. I do not want to embarrass her by calling her to come to the telephone."

"Yes, you are right," Zaynon said. "It is not decent to do that. You are always a gallant and honorable man. Please give her my best regards, and tell her I miss her terribly."

"I certainly will tell her," Jamil said. "I am very sure she missed you as well."

"What did you do last night?" Zaynon asked. "I mean how did you spend your evening?"

"Not much, really," Jamil responded. "She cooked us a small simple dinner, visited for a few minutes, then we went to bed."

"Please Jamil, do tonight as you did last night," Zaynon said. "No hanky panky business!"

Jamil laughed and said, "Don't worry Zaynon! I promise you I will. Yes, I will!! My condolences to your friend's family. See you."

Chapter 19

Jamil, a scholar at heart, sat in the living room struggling in vain to concentrate on the neatly typed notes on the conference lectures. His assistant had done a good job. She had instinctively recognized the important points in a copious amount of material. Despite his best efforts he could think only of her and her good points, of which she had abundance. A small noise by his side caused him to look up. His "bride" was standing there, luggage in hand. Her eyes, as they met his, seemed wearily withdrawn.

"Professor Dahshan, I think it is best I leave," she spoke, quietly, a tremor threatening. "I'll not wait. Please apologize to Zaynon for me. You are free to tell him anything you choose."

The professor, standing in an attitude of humility replied, "Of course, I'll be glad to tell him tomorrow when he returns. He telephoned and said he was sorry but it was necessary to stay over." An awkward pause lengthened. Jamil was groping within himself for the right words. Finally he sat with his head bowed in an attitude of humility,

"Amanda, dear, beloved one, there are no words, no excuses for what I did or ways of asking your forgiveness," he said as humbly as possible, voice full of regret and sadness. "My love for you should have led me to protect you and cherish your innocence. I do want you to know one thing though. I have been out of my mind these times with you--so in love with you and so close and yet unable to express it. I only wanted to have you for my very own. How could I tell you?"

"Jamil, you really can't mean this. You had only to declare your love and all could and would have been different. You certainly must have known I loved you. You must have known from the start, even before I did myself. Or did you think I just go running after any man?"

"No! No! How could I guess? You are engaged; you told me so," Jamil angrily interrupted.

"Oh, Jamil! I did say I was engaged to Paul. What a mistake it was not to finish the story and tell you the rest. Please let me now!" she pleaded. She sat on the edge of the sofa and started to speak. "It is true that I have loved Paul since the days

of our first acquaintance. He is fine and good. I have made a promise to him, but it is only that I will spend this summer in his absence deciding whether I will be his wife.”

Jamil wanted to tell her that she had already told him this, but he did not want to deprive himself of that charming melodic voice.

“It would be hard for me to be his wife or to belong to any man whose bed I could not share in love and happy fulfillment. It is hard to think this and doubly hard to say it. I simply do not love him that way. He is more brother than anything else, and while he is willing to gamble on my falling in love later, I am not. He deserves better than that. Anyhow, I already had told you about this in full detail. I decided not to marry him while I was still in America,” she concluded.

Jamil sat thinking how right Zaynon had been. Amanda was in love with him. How he hated this kind of sticky business!

She continued. "I thought perhaps physical love was not for me. When I saw you sleeping on the plane, I had a feeling previously unknown to me-- a strong desire to cradle your head on my breast," Amanda confided. She crossed the few yards to him and pulled his shoulders down to her and his head against her neck.

Jamil took her down with him onto the sofa, holding her face in his hands while his eyes searched hers. "I love you. I love you with all my being. I feel I am the luckiest and the happiest man under the sun.”

Amanda kissed him and stood, taking him up with her. She pressed her body close and urgently to his. The right words came easily for him. They were all so well rehearsed.

"I love you too, you are mine."

As she started moving away, Jamil made a grab for her waist. She laughed and dodged out of reach. "No, not now. I am going to fix us some dinner. Tonight you will come to my room as my own true love and I will be there sitting on 'Cloud 9', waiting to love you."

Jamil was hardly listening. He couldn't keep his eyes off her lips. Never had they been so inviting, so sensual. Only in loving and being loved could the natural beauty of her mouth come out. There was certain coolness, a reserve in the way her lips had relaxed as their lovely outlines became visible. He wanted to kiss her and forget the food. He must be patient now. Tonight the game was hers, the rules were hers and the submission would be hers too! The pleasure was also hers. For the first time, Professor Jamil Dahshan was game on these terms.

“Darling, you are flooding me with your love and drowning me with your praises. I feel I am hovering among the clouds and swimming in God’s realm, and I want to stay over there forever,” Amanda said and threw herself in his arms and started kissing him passionately.

“Wow, wow!” Jamil exclaimed. “You are becoming an erotic and romantic poet. How marvelous and beautiful is that?”

“Thanks to you. You have inspired me to do so, Darling.”

“I am happy I inspired beautiful ideas rather than ugly ones.”

“A chap with your pride and dignity and who possesses your purity and your conscience would neither commit nor teach ugly deeds. You make me so proud and happy.”

“Thank you, Sweetheart. You made me very happy, too,” Jamil said, kissing her. Then he added, “Do you know, my love, that ever since I was a little boy I have dreamed of meeting and falling in love with a girl who possesses the physical qualities and intellectual attributes that you do!” He paused for a minute and took a sip of his drink before adding, “Believe me, Sweetheart, in every daily prayer, and these occur five times every day as you probably know, while I was kneeling in adoration and religious *tahajjud* watch, and while my face was embracing the floor, I was always asking the Almighty in His high heaven to kindly and generously grant me the girl of whom I was dreaming.”

Once again, Jamil paused as he sipped his drink. “The first night I laid an eye on you in Hollywood, I was convinced that He, glory be to Him, had answered my prayers and fulfilled my dreams. I was going to tell you that night, but I was downhearted and so drunk and feeble, as you had noticed, that I was unable to utter a single word.”

All this time while Jamil was talking, he was gazing at her face admiringly like a Sufi dervish who lives in heavenly ecstasy and deep contemplation with his Creator, or a devoted heathen communing deeply with the statue that he worships. The English Venus did not utter a single word or open her mouth while her enthralled lover was talking. She only gazed at his face admiringly with wide open eyes.

“Please, Sweetheart, my emotions are boiling inside of me as water in a boiler, and I feel feverish desire to weep softly and silently in front of your feet. So allow me by granting a touch of your striking beauty and ravishing femininity. Let me feel the

breeze of your compassion, a bundle of your charm, and a bouquet of your grace. I am starving and deadly thirsty for them.”

“Why do you say that, Darling?” Amanda asked wonderingly. “You do not need to ask me for that. I am all yours. Every part of me I give to you willingly--my body, my soul and every atom of my being.”

“I want my heart to join yours and to melt in order to enter every cell of your being,” he said.

“You are already there. Believe me, you are. I am all yours.”

Amanda wiped away the tears with the back of her right hand and said with shivering voice and trembling body, “I can bear no more. Please stop singing my praises.” Then she threw herself into his lap and started kissing him passionately on his lips, hair, face, neck and every place her lips could reach.

At this point, her Valentino stood up briskly, bent his huge, strong body, and lifted her up, cradling her between his arms like a little baby. Bringing her close to his chest, he headed toward her bedroom while she still kissed him passionately and feverishly.

He enthroned her in a chair while she was still wearing her nightgown, sat on the floor in front of her cross-legged as Buddha did, and looked at her radiant face. At this moment, Jamil felt that he entered suddenly into a heavenly trance and said, “Let me first bow in adoration to Allah, the Almighty, Creator of man pure and perfect, heaven and earth, the Gracious and the Merciful, the Independent and Besought of all. The One, who begets not, nor is begotten. There is none like unto Him. He knows what is open and what is hidden. Let me ask His forgiveness and remission of sins and glorify the Most High Who creates and perfects and who designs and guides. Let me thank Him for being kind and generous for giving you to me as a precious and rare gift.”

“Am I so dear and precious to you, darling? I feel I am living in a twilight zone and in ecstasy,” Amanda said happily.

“Yes, Sweetheart, you are. I want to love you greater and greater until my soul melts into yours, and we become one person.” He then burst out crying loudly.

“Why do you cry, Darling?” she asked, terrified. “You are weeping as if you were grieving, as though we were not going to see each other again.”

“I am weeping because so many years passed from my life before I met you. I consider my life was empty and pure waste before I met you, before my soul embraced yours. I feel I am even closer to God since I fell in love with you.”

“Oh, Darling! Please don’t feel that way. I am burning with emotion. Please hold me tight. I want to vanish in your arms. We are still young and our lives are ahead of us.” Then she joined him in weeping. Jamil’s tears and sobbing were an ardent and passionate message of thanks and recognition to the Almighty for Him granting him this beautiful, intellectual, elegant and chaste maiden.

After both of them stopped sobbing, Jamil dried her tears with his kisses and she dried his with the back of her hand. The young lady trying to change the stifling and depressing atmosphere between them said, “Please, Darling, tell me more about your life back home in Jordon, your childhood, your family and your friends. I know it is very interesting and it is dear to my heart.”

Her sudden request made Jamil’s memory jump to recall his naïve and good-hearted friend, Moses. “I am going to tell you about a friend of mine whose story would seem to you rather odd and strange due to differences in custom and culture.”

“You have aroused my curiosity, so please do,” Amanda said.

“This incident took place in Amman the day I left Jordon for America. It was August, the hottest month with the longest days in the year. Our house was crowded with people--men and women, children and elderly, the residents of the house, relatives, neighbors and friends. Some of them, such as my mother, my sisters, and my aunts, were crying because I was leaving them to go to a very far-away country where there would be nobody to take care of me if I were to get hungry or sick. Others, such as my brother, my uncles and my friends, were very happy. They believed strongly that I was making a wise choice by going to the New World where people are comfortable, live luxurious lives, enjoy absolute happiness and have plenty of worldly goods. They thought the government over there pampered her citizens as a compassionate mother pampers her beloved child.

“Every place in the house was occupied by a group of people visiting or listening to someone telling anecdotes about the country of opportunity, abundance, and joy. Some of the people were from Amman itself. Others came from Salt where every member of our family was born. Many, many families of our tribe have moved from Salt to Amman or other cities of the Kingdom. But the majority of them are still living there.” Jamil stood and stretched, his eyes gazing into his past.

“Is the tribe which carried the name Dahshan large?” asked the English beauty.

“Not very large. It is medium. There are only about one thousand people.”

“Oh, my God! One thousand people! And you say medium? How big is a large tribe then?”

“Double the size of our tribe.”

“How do you know each other? How could you remember so many faces and names?”

“That is no problem because not a single week passes without their having an occasion to get together. Most of them meet for the Prophet’s birthday, the Hajrah (New Year), the fasting month of Ramadan, weddings, circumcisions, the celebration of the birth of a baby; social gatherings, going and coming from pilgrimages or trips or someone is entering the jail due to misbehavior or has been released and so forth.”

“Is your family well known?”

“Yes, very well known,” Jamil said. “If it happened that you were to go to Salt and ask the first person you meet about any member of our family, that person will tell you to follow him to the house of the person about whom you asked. While you are walking to the house, he will tell you the highlights of that person’s life.”

“Splendid! How wonderful and pleasing to have that number of relatives. How I wish that I could be one of them,” said Amanda.

“Don’t worry, Sweetheart. You will soon be one of them. I am pretty sure they will love you and be very happy to see you,” the Jamil said proudly. The beauty laughed happily and threw herself on his lap and started kissing him anew. He prevented her gently from doing so and resumed his talking.

“My departure for America was sudden. The time between deciding and leaving was only one week. We announced it only to very close relatives and friends. Otherwise, several hundreds of them would be present to say goodbye to me since the distance between Salt and Amman is about 20 kilometers. In spite of concealing the news about traveling, the whole house and the space around the house was full. The living room, guest reception room, the balcony, the bedrooms and even the sidewalk in front of the house were all crowded with people.”

Amanda nodded her head as if saying, “I don’t blame you for not announcing it to all the people you know.”

“My mother cooked an early lunch for all the people present because we were expecting more well-wishers to come in the afternoon. We had just finished drinking our sweetened hot tea, the sweetened Turkish coffee and the black coffee as custom required, when we heard a slam-bang of brakes. The sound horrified us, and everyone hurried to see who or what could have been hurt. I rushed to the window. To my amazement, I saw my friend Moses, his wife, and his four-month old daughter getting out of a taxi. I ran to meet him.

After spreading a wide and cheerful smile over my face, I extended my hand and said, ‘Welcome, my dear friend! It is good to see you. You should not have bothered yourself, your wife and your baby to come in this hot weather.’

“Moses shifted the magazine he was carrying from his right hand to his left and extended his hand unenthusiastically. ‘If I were your good friend, as you claim,’ he said, ‘you would have told me about your leaving, and not have let me hear the news accidentally from the son of your neighbor who came to buy a bottle of soda.’

“I was very embarrassed and ashamed and felt myself smaller than an insect. Waves of burning sweat drowned my body. While I was shaking Moses’s hand, I was wiping sweat with the back of my left hand, my eyes avoiding his fiery looks. ‘I realize now that you are the first one I should have told. I feel so ashamed! I am very sorry,’ I stuttered. Moses’s angry eyes emitted sparks. ‘Honestly, I did not want to bother you. Anyway, thank you very much. I know how much you respect and value our friendship.’

“Moses acted as though he had heard nothing. He said. ‘You must accept my invitation for a lunch or dinner, your choice. And you are welcome to bring as many people with you as you wish.’

“I replied, ‘Thank you very much, my dear friend. It is very, very difficult to fulfill your wish. There is not time. Thank you again.’”

“Someone in the crowd said, ‘Who is this fellow? He is not a member of our family; I’ve never seen him before.’

“‘He must be a close friend to the family,’ another answered.

“Moses ignored all the comments and said to me, ‘I swear by my father’s head and mustache and by my family’s honor and its integrity that you will accept my invitation for lunch.’

“Two fellows burst out laughing hilariously because Moses’s family came from a very small remote village and the family was not well-known. One of them

said, ‘He’s swearing by his father as if he were King Hussien or President Jamal Abdulnasir, and as if his family were of the tribe of Quarish, the family of our Prophet Mohammed!’”

“No doubt the behavior of those people angered and infuriated Moses,” said Amanda.

“Indeed it did! I told Moses that we had just finished lunch. I looked at my hand-watch and added, ‘After exactly two hours and forty-two minutes the rental car will come to take my brother and me to Damascus, then to Beirut, because tomorrow afternoon I am leaving for America. Thank you very much for the invitation. I know how much you respect and value our friendship. Please consider as if you had thrown a lunch party for us all.’”

“He must love and respect you to feel he had to serve you and your family a meal before your departure,” Amanda said, but Jamil did not comment.

“Moses said firmly and pertinaciously, while his hand was still holding mine, ‘You must accept. I will not acknowledge any excuse.’ During this debate a large crowd of people gathered around while Moses’s wife stood not far from us.

“‘This is impossible, my good friend,’ I told Moses. ‘We just finished lunch and by dinner time, *inshallah* by the will of God, we will be in Damascus or Beirut,’ I said, getting nervous.

“Moses refused to take ‘no’ for an answer. ‘I swear by almighty Allah, and by His three prophets--our master Mohammed, our master Jesus, and our master, Moses--I will not accept any excuse and you must have a meal in my house. Otherwise, I will get very angry and I will never again talk to you or see you.’ Having said that, he let loose of my hand.”

“Oh, my God!” Amanda said. “He was certainly persistent and stubborn.”

“Everybody who heard Moses said, ‘*Manshi...manshi...manshi.*’ which means withdrawn, withdrawn, withdrawn.”

“What does that mean?” the young lady asked. “I do not understand.”

“In the Arab world, when someone gives an oath while he is angry and the listener knows that he will not be able to do it or he cannot fulfill it, or it cannot be done, they say ‘*Manshi, manshi, manshi.*’ You would say it in English that all is forgiven and not only forgiven but erased.

“‘Jamil is telling you we just had lunch, and very soon he will be on his way to Lebanon,’ said one of the people who was present.

Another said, ‘Jamil is trying to tell you something. He accepted and valued your invitation and also considered that he had lunch at your house. What do you want more than that? We came this morning to invite Jamil and he apologized for not being able to accept our father’s invitation due to shortage of time. We accepted his apology. I also heard two other family members invite him today, and he apologized. We are his cousins. Are you closer to him than we are?’”

“At this point Moses reached the peak of his anger and the extremity of his humiliation. In a trembling voice and with a shivering body he said, ‘I swear I will divorce my wife! I will divorce my wife! I will divorce my wife if you do not accept my invitation! You have to accept my invitation!’

“I was shocked . . . dismayed . . . horrified. Waves of deep sadness came over me and gripped my heart. My thinking ceased. I did not know what to say or do because I knew the consequences to him and his family of the oath he had taken! I was upset and grieved.

“One of the fellows said to Moses, ‘Indeed you are *majnoon wa baheem* insane and a jackass.’

“Another old man standing nearby said, ‘You know your request is impossible and you are still swearing. What are you trying to prove? You have committed a big mistake, son, and God only knows how it will be solved and worked out.’

“‘You have proved yourself retarded,’ said another. There were many, many comments. Every person in the audience said something to scold him for what he had said.

“Suddenly we heard Nofah, Moses’s wife, tearing the skies with loud lamentation because she was the one who was going to be hit hard. She started slapping and deeply scratching her face and tearing her hair and her clothes. Her face was bloody. She cried hysterically, ‘Oh, my God! My misfortune, my calamity, my disaster! What shall I do and where shall I go? I am an orphan. I have no mother or father or brothers. Who will take care of me? I am alone in this world!’ .

“Life darkened in my eyes,” said Jamil to Amanda. “Great sadness occupied my being. I felt downhearted and about to smother. I implored to God in high heaven to hurry to my aid show me what to do to prevent the disaster of Moses divorcing his wife. And soon, glory be to Him, He inspired me with a solution.

“I waved to my friend Fehmi who was standing not far from me and was the only person present who had a car. I asked him to hurry and bring his car. I sat

beside him in the car and asked Moses and his wife to sit in the back seat. I instructed Fehmi to head toward Moses's house."

All this time Amanda did not utter a single word. She was only gazing at Jamil with open mouth and astonished eyes.

"As we pulled away, the people shouted, 'Where are you going? The car from Beirut will come and find you. Don't listen to this crazy man. He must be *jahill* ignorant.' You will be late!"

"About this time I heard my brother, Karim, telling the congregation not to worry because he guessed what I was going to do. There was great love, respect and understanding between me and my brother. I always looked to him as though he were my father, and he always considered me his son. We always read each other's minds without saying a word.

When we arrived at Moses's house, I asked his wife to make us some scrambled eggs and cut some tomatoes. While Moses, Fehmi, and I were eating, she made us tea. After drinking the tea, Moses and I embraced and he asked me not to forget him and to write to him. He wished me bon voyage and good luck in America. Moses's wife approached me and wanted to kiss my hand in appreciation of saving her marriage, but I prevented her from doing that. She looked in my eyes and I could see tears of gratitude in hers."

Amanda said, with happiness shining in her face. "Darling, why did Moses swear to divorce his wife if you didn't accept his invitation? And what does his wife have to do with accepting or refusing?"

"Sweet Love, this is one of the cultural differences between the Eastern world and the Western one. Sometimes it is very, very difficult for one person from this culture to understand the other person's behavior or thinking. Let me explain. Some uneducated people from that part of the world have the habit of swearing by God or one of his prophets about everything they say. Sometimes they even swear by their fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, uncles, by the king of the country, by anyone who dear to their heart whom they love or respect. They mean that they are speaking the truth and not a lie to you."

Amanda asked, "Would Moses have had an obligation to divorce his wife if he took that oath and did not fulfill it?"

"Sweet Love, it is a very complicated issue. He would have to go through many legal rituals before he could lawfully gain back his wife."

“Could he have lived with his wife as if nothing had happened if you had refused to go to his home for a meal?”

“No. Even if he accepted the fact that I could not go and was willing to ignore his oath as though it had never been uttered, his wife wouldn’t. Suppose she was willing, her parents, her brothers and uncles wouldn’t be willing to ignore it. Suppose the family was willing to accept the situation, then the neighbors would not be. Everybody who knew what happened would talk badly about them and say they were living in sin.”

“Wow! That far?” Amanda asked in astonishment.

“Yes, Sweetheart, that far.”

“What do you think about that?” she asked.

“Remember, Sweetheart, I am the product of that culture and I am supposed to think or to believe the way they do. Otherwise, I will be considered in their eyes a libertine!”

“What if you had chosen not to go with him to his house and have lunch?”

“If I had done that, Moses and his wife would be miserable, and only God knows what would have become of them. Understand, however, that I would never entertain the idea of leaving without accepting his invitation.”

“Even if you had to postpone the time of your departure?”

“Even if I had to cancel it! I would never leave without accepting his invitation. How could I live with my conscience when I knew I had caused anyone’s unhappiness, let alone a dear friend like Moses?”

“I am so proud of you,” Amanda told him. “I am sure I am with an honest and faithful man who can be trusted and relied upon.”

“I pray to God I will live up to your expectations,” Jamil said sincerely.

“Moses and you must be very close friends to go through all these troubles. How come you were going to leave for America without your telling him?”

Suddenly Jamil felt thirsty so he excused himself, went to the kitchen, brought himself a can of beer and brought Amanda a can of soda then continued. “Let me tell you first how Moses and I became friends. But I don’t know where to start; it’s a little bit odd,” said Jamil.

“Now, you have made me more anxious to hear about it,” Amanda said.

“One afternoon I was accidentally passing by an empty shop which was located on a street behind our house. Every time I passed that shop, I wished that

someone would open it. That day there was some merchandise in the store and a fellow in his early thirties was standing in front of it and saying hello to everyone passing by the store. He would do this by pressing his right hand to his chest, and bowing his head in respect to the passer-by and saying in an audible voice, ‘*Tafazal* (please) come in.’

“I accepted his invitation, shook hands with him, exchanged names, and expressed my appreciation and admiration since no other shop was close by. It seemed to me that Moses felt comfortable with me and valued my gratitude since I told him we needed badly a place like his in this quarter of the city. Now we could shop in his store instead of walking a long way in order to buy a bottle of soda or a box of matches or other such small things. He told me the highlights of his life. He had come to Amman from his remote little village for the first time one year earlier to visit his cousin who was working as a janitor in the city hall, hoping to get the same job. But Moses’s employment was denied due to his illiteracy.”

“But, Darling, you mentioned he was carrying a magazine.”

Jamil smiled and continued. “Moses loved city life because the people had plenty of life’s goods while every one in his village lived in destitution. So he decided not to return to his village. The streets in the capital are asphalted, wide and clean, while in his village they are narrow and very dirty and made of earth instead of asphalt. The homes in the city have electricity and piped water. In his village the people bring their water from the spring on the donkeys or on their backs. In the capital they use cars and busses for transportation. In his village they walk or use burros, donkeys and mules. In the city women are beautiful, coquettish and perfumed. In his village they are dirty and smell of the dunghill. The men in the city are clean and smooth shaven while in his village they are dirty and have long beards. So he decided to stay.”

“Wow,” exclaimed the young lady. “I don’t blame him for deciding to stay in the capital if that is the case.”

“His cousin told him that he had saved some money and offered to lend it to him. He suggested that he buy some cartons of produce at wholesale from the main market and try his luck selling the produce at retail in front of one of the neighboring mosques. Moses bought a carton each of tomatoes, grapes, eggplants, cucumbers, squash, green beans, green peppers, figs, cauliflower, jalapenos and many other fruits and vegetables. He hired a pickup and its owner to bring them in front of a mosque.

To his surprise he sold all he had bought by the end of the day and found himself making a good profit, because he had good quality at much cheaper prices than the shops in town. There were no other stores in that section of the neighborhood. If a customer did not have enough money to pay in full, Moses would tell him not to worry but to bring it the next time. This caused his customers to love and respect him.”

“No doubt he was a very smart chap,” said Amanda.

“Yes, he is very smart and ambitious, too. His cousin suggested to him he should rent a place instead of standing under the hot sun since business was good. Then he could not only sell produce but could add small amounts of other things needed in the neighborhood: sugar, rice, tea, cooking oil, soda, matches, cigarettes, copy books for the children, pencils, erasers and more. The idea pleased Moses very highly, so he kept searching until he found this empty shop.”

“I am sure one of these days he will be very rich,” the young lady said.

“The problem which faced the ambitious young merchant was that most of his customers bought on credit and paid him several days later or even at the end of the month. Since he was illiterate, that was a problem.”

“So he wanted your help by keeping track of his debts for him?”

“God bless you, Sweetheart! Yes. He offered to pay me some money in order to do that. I told him that because I admired his ambition and hard work, I would stop by his place once a day and keep his books for him but I would not accept taking any wages, not even a bottle of soda. I kept doing that until the day before the day of my departure. When I was not in the country, Moses asked the customer himself to enter the information. If the customer were also illiterate, he would wait until someone literate would come and do it for him. I suggested to him that he should attend one of the government night schools for wiping out illiteracy among adults. But Moses said he would feel embarrassed and bashful to do that.”

“My God, how a person could live nowadays without knowing how to read and write!” exclaimed Amanda. “But you mentioned that when he came to your house on the day of your departure, he was carrying a magazine.”

Jamil laughed and said, “This is another story. After about two weeks Moses spoke to me without looking into my face. Instead he gazed down at his shoes, giving me the impression that he was reluctant and embarrassed. He then asked me whether I would be kind and generous enough to bring him the magazines and newspapers I

buy after I finish reading them. I told him I would be very happy to do that since I know small shops buy these old or used magazines and newspapers very cheaply. They cut them into pieces and use them to wrap merchandise instead of buying ready-made bags and paying a lot of money for them. Moses lifted his eyes to mine briefly; then again he lowered them and looked at his shoes.

“In a forlorn voice he said, ‘I feel ashamed and inferior when I am at the market place and wherever else I go, because I see people buying or carrying newspapers or magazines. I think people will respect me more when they see me carrying these magazines and newspapers. They will think not only that I am literate and can read and write, but will know I am educated and intellectual, also.’

“At first, I was amazed and puzzled at his idea. But after I thought of it, I felt it was a sign of intelligence and ambition.”

“Indeed it is,” Amanda said enthusiastically. “This chap, if he had the chance to go to school and university, would become famous in politics, economics and literature, even in science.”

“Anyhow, since that day, Moses was never seen outside of his shop without carrying a newspaper or a magazine.”

“What has become of him? I mean, have you heard of him since you left Jordan?”

“Every time I receive a letter from my mother or brother, they tell me Moses or his wife has visited them and sent their *salam* to me, wishing me success in America. And every time I write them a letter, I ask them to convey my regards and best wishes for success to him. In the last letter I received from my brother before I came to England, he told me that Moses is attending night school and learning how to read and write and very soon I will be receiving letters from him.”

“I am delighted to hear that. Good for him!” Amanda said. Then she added, “Why, then, did you hide your departure from him?”

“I really wanted to spare him and myself since I knew the agony, torment and disappointment involved in my leaving. I know how much he likes me and respects me.”

The young lady nodded her head several times as if she were saying, “I understand.”

Chapter 20

Late Monday afternoon the car door slammed and Amanda met Zaynon at the door. "How good it is to see you, Zaynon! You look totally exhausted. How is everything with your friend?" she asked.

"Amanda, I am exhausted, really exhausted mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally," he confessed. "Things calmed down after some of the relatives and friends arrived. It was a devastating shock. It will all take time to get over it. Say, you look happy and bubbly. Now don't tell me I brought this on just by getting back!" he joked.

The ecstatic young lady reached for Jamil's hand and drew him to her side, giving him an assuring smile. To Zaynon she said, "It is very good news, indeed. Jamil and I are in love; we have found each other."

"Ya elahi! Matha asma?" "Oh, my God! What am I hearing?" Zaynon yelled.

Jamil had wished to avoid this tired, familiar face before him, now suddenly ashen, the old tic in the left cheek starting to work as it always had when Zaynon became angry or distressed--a silent testimony to his emotions or a warning of a pending outburst.

"Have you done it, you vile pig?" he asked in Arabic. Zaynon was in a volcanic anger. He smiled and put his arms around Amanda in a big bear hug. Over her shoulder his eyes searched Jamil's face, angry eyes flaring up momentarily.

"Dear friend, you know I will always want what makes you happy," he assured Amanda. He turned to Jamil. "Would you be so good as to fix me a scotch-on-the-rocks? Make it a double, please. I'm going to change before I relax." In a light, bantering tone he said to Amanda as he went, "I really can't see what you see in him, though; I really can't!"

As he passed the bar, Zaynon whispered in Arabic, "Louse! You have done it! What did you promise her?"

"First place in my harem, of course!" Jamil flipped back, following Zaynon into the bedroom with the drink he had requested. "I have three more weeks here. Would it not be better for me to spend it elsewhere, since you hate me so much?"

"Of course not," came the tired reply through the shirt going over his head. He added, "Your being here isn't what hurts me. You know that. It's this other dirty business. Please don't hurt her! I would never forgive you. She is an angel," he concluded with a serious, pleading look on his tired face.

Jamil said nothing; he only nodded his head several times.

The remaining time sped by. In the evenings, the three were always together. Zaynon had given up his own pursuits for their company. He was never allowed to feel like an intruder. The lovers had everything to their liking week days when they were together without interruption or fear of discovery. The details of any private plans or hopes the bride might be harboring bothered the bridegroom not at all, for the time together was too rewarding to be encumbered by thoughts of tomorrow.

It would be futile to describe the happiness in which Zaynon, Jamil and Amanda lived, for it bloomed so far beyond description or comparison that even the most gifted writer--no matter how intensely vivid his imagination or how broad his scope and clarity of perception--would be helpless to do justice to the joyous pleasures they experienced the next three weeks. Their pleasure was unabated; no unhappiness possessed the strength to interrupt it. Jamil was convinced that if Paradise, immortalized by the Holy Books, includes all the pleasures he then experienced, it would be a short sighted, stupid, narrow-minded and ignorant person who failed to spend all their earthly existence worshiping and exalting God wholeheartedly to assure that on that final day they would be awarded a place in that glorious heaven.

The three lived a life style that catered to indulgence as if they had but three weeks left to live--that at the first stroke of the clock marking the beginning of the fourth week, their lives would end in death, destroying the opportunity to ever again experience such pleasure. Hence they treasured every second of those three weeks as a precious drop of water in a parched land, wasting none of the golden moments, so that when visited by the Angel of Death, they could claim to have completely exhausted every moment the past three weeks had offered and received every possible pleasure in return.

After Zaynon returned from work, the three musketeers would shower, slip into their best clothes and spruce up in preparation for that night. They would laugh and chatter pleasurably while drinking from glasses filled with the most expensive drinks. Zaynon had discovered a most exclusive brand that offered all the pleasure of drink, but not the evil after-effects such as headaches, poor balance, and nausea. As the time for dinner drew close, the three of them would make their way to one of the more fashionable restaurants in Oxford.

After dinner, they would attend a play, visit a night club or drive deep into the countryside where they were out of the reach of city lights and only the moon and the stars shone brilliantly. There they would sit watching the night-sky or simply relaxing in the peaceful, calm presence of the night surrounded by the darkened landscape. Frequently they would spend the hours after dinner sitting at home with music playing in the background, talking in depth about music, art and literature.

The two men quickly realized and admired the charming young lady's wide knowledge and deep appreciation for these fields and avidly debated her views. Occasionally the young professor, Jamil, would sit before the secondary school history teacher, Amanda, as she discoursed about music, art, philosophy and literature, as if he were in the presence of a sage. He traveled the paths of her mind in exaltation as her analysis of life opened up a new world for him.

One day Amanda revealed to her lover her suspicions that Zaynon found no pleasurable inclination towards the female sex. She was almost convinced of his disinterest. She mentioned this more than once to Jamil when they chanced to be alone. Jamil although aware of her constant whispered urgings, preferred to remain silent, feigning disinterest or changing the topic of conversation.

"Why do you ignore the question or quickly introduce a new topic every time I ask you about Zaynon's disinterest?" she asked as she stood before him one day. She offered Jamil no opportunity to escape, persisting with a strong resolve to drag an answer from him. "I want to know the reason now. He is homosexual, isn't he? The suspicion has crossed my mind many times. I kept watching him, but never found proof to contradict or confirm my belief. I know you told me once that he has lost a sweetheart and cannot bear to tarnish her memory with a new woman."

"Sweetheart, the roses adore you, the light of my eyes, the torch of my life!" Jamil said, holding her hands and kissing them. Looking into her eyes, he asked,

“Why bother your big heart and pure soul by worrying about these trifling and insignificant matters?”

“They are not trifling and insignificant as you say, but very important and serious,” Amanda said, pushing back her seat back nervously and then bringing it forward again. “I am fully aware of the implications I am stating. I am also aware that Zaynon treats me with the utmost respect and consideration. That is what puzzles and disturbs me.

“With all other women, Zaynon seems disrespectful and non compliant as if he hates them because they are women. He does not think twice about yelling and fighting with them for no good reason! I know that when a lover loses his sweetheart he is humbled and emits gratitude towards others in the hopes that he may be forgiven for his failed relationship. But Zaynon seems to be treating any woman he meets with ill will. Do you understand what I am trying to say to you?”

“I understand you perfectly, my love! I am fully aware of all you have to say. His behavior is strange and inconceivably immoral. It has repeatedly embarrassed and saddened me; but because I know what causes Zaynon to conduct himself in such an inexcusable way, I have decided to forgive his bad behavior. Jamil spread a sad and gloomy smile over his face and added, “I have been hiding the real reason from you to protect your feelings, and that is the reason I made up this vicious story. I am just trying to protect you! I thought that it wouldn’t matter so much if you didn’t know the real reason for his behavior.”

As a result of her newly acquired knowledge, Amanda’s eyes grew larger and larger and Jamil’s heart started to race in anticipation. He had no idea how Amanda would react to his disloyal behavior. “I hate to agree with you, Sweetheart, but I have noticed the same things you have many times. When I am with him, I am embarrassed by his treatment of women.” Jamil was disturbed by her questions that uncovered an evil nest of memories that he had no wish to disturb. Admitting to Zaynon’s sexual preference was something he wished to avoid recognizing publicly, even to Amanda. He could find no answer to fend her off, until the benevolent heaven came to his aid.

“Back home Zaynon had a bad car accident and permanently lost his manhood. He is very sensitive about it and the least hint of it will injure his feeling and squash his pride. So, please be careful with him and never mention anything about it.”

Amanda was shocked and her face paled. She was both embarrassed by her accusations and deeply pained by the discovery. Her face was clouded in sympathy and feeling for Zaynon, and she had only kind words for him. Alas! Indeed, it was a tragedy.

“So the story you told me about the drowning of his fiancé was not true?”

Jamil shook his head several times and said, “I am sorry. I did not know what to say to you at that time. He has a big heart and is full of tenderness and compassion. There are few who can match his generosity.” Pain clutched at Amanda’s heart.

The English bride attended all of the young professor’s conferences and lectures, taking notes for him. With the charming young Amanda by his side, the ambitious professor who had felt ashamed of being from an under-developed country, now puffed out his chest like a male cock. He paraded the exquisite Madonna like a prize he had conquered from his ex-colonial masters. He no longer imagined that he stood out so harshly against the English people. When introducing her to his colleagues at the conference or to Zaynon's friends he felt puffed up with enormous pride and introduced her as his fiancée.

“May I introduce to you all my fiancée, Miss Amanda Hamilton,” Jamil would say. “I adore and respect her as the most charming, compassionate, sensitive and sweet female in the whole United Kingdom.”

“Professor Dahsham is flattering me by giving me all those qualities which I don’t possess!’ she would say and laugh. He always noticed with much satisfaction, that people looked at her in admiration, although it saddened him to see some people burn with envy and jealousy.

The elegant young lady had a great sense of fashion and made herself up beautifully. She had a charming, musical voice which attracted her listeners, both male and female. One thing that itched at Jamil was Zaynon's growing fondness for Amanda. Zaynon would neither eat nor drink unless she served him. He never returned home without carrying a bouquet of flowers for her, a box of chocolates, or a bag of rare fruits. Many times he bought her bottles of exclusive perfume.

Jamil and Amanda would often sleep late into the morning, until their sexual passion had been exhausted and driven from their bodies in satisfaction. After the initial euphoria wore off, they would awaken early, borrow Zaynon's car and visit the surrounding countryside. The happy young lover acted as the tour guide, uncovering all the interesting places. She did not leave a single site in her Oxford surroundings undiscovered, making sure her sweetheart, Jamil, saw everything. The two of them played with their love among some of Britain's most captivating countryside. Their life was idealistic. After the first two weeks, the two lovers stayed overnight if they found a village that caught their attention. Later, they would call Zaynon and invite him to join them. The three became a close family. They loved each other, and no one had the strength to live independently of the others.

One day, Amanda suggested to Jamil that they find time to visit some of the beautiful sights and places outside the United Kingdom. He agreed happily. "Of course, if they ask me to teach next summer, I'll apologize and we can definitely spend the summer months in Europe, or I might take you to the Middle East and show you the ancient cities of the world."

"It's a marvelous idea, my love!" Amanda's face was lit with joy, and her eyes sparkled. "I have seen places in Europe more beautiful than ours. I would love to see them again, and I could show them all to you!" Her enthusiasm bubbled addictively.

"There is no more beautiful creation made by God's hand, than you. I do not doubt that your charm and elegance enhances the beauty of the places we will visit."

"Thank you, Darling; you are too kind. Do you know that I think that I love you more every day? Every hour I discover in you a new quality. I have only the Lord to thank for that!"

"I thank Him too," Jamil said. He has granted me a girl who cracked the mold after her and has no equal.

Chapter 21

While Zaynon and Jamil were enjoying tea and biscuits after Jamil had finished packing on the day he was to return to America, he said, "I told Amanda the story of my emotional break with the Arab homeland. I told her of my drinking . . . with a good deal of embarrassment, I must admit."

Zaynon laughed, familiar with the story. With an inquisitive expression to his face he asked, "What happened after that? I have always wanted to ask you."

"Didn't I ever tell you?"

"No."

"Well, I left my cabin when I became sober, searching for love. I had spent twenty-four years dreaming of this moment, and now I searched for my first introduction. I found her sitting alone beside the ship's railings, watching the last vestiges of the sun before it slipped behind the horizon. She had dark hair and dark skin; her eyes exuded a dreamy consciousness. I forget her name, excuse me. You know I have a short memory concerning women's names. She was a Greek girl, an immigrant, on her way to America. She knew very little English, and occasionally we would communicate with hand signals. We spent two days together and only parted late at night to return to bed."

Jamil chuckled and added, "You will not believe this, but I even resisted the temptation of kissing her. I proclaimed my adoration and love for her. Believe me, Zaynon, it would be an evil and cruel thing to do if I did not have the most honorable intentions to support me. But with no experience in love, I had not yet separated right from wrong. I was telling her the truth as it shone in my heart. I was deprived of love and yearned for it. But when I said all this, she laughed until tears came to her eyes. She told me I was a wolf and I wanted to prey on her under the pretense of love."

Suddenly, Jamil felt as if the scene from the past were happening now, so he closed his eyes, frowned and shook his head. "I felt as if she had slapped me, spat in my face, made fun of my moral sanctuary, my holy integrity. She insulted my most sacred beliefs. I swallowed my pride and dignity and turned my back on her with a wounded heart."

"Why did you suddenly become sensitive and easily get hurt?" Zaynon asked sarcastically! Jamil ignored the question and continued his story.

“Once again I drank, but this time I turned to whiskey. I was learning that alcohol had a wonderful curative effect on a broken heart. At the bar there was a tall blond woman of average looks, a slim girl, a genuine American returning home from vacation. She was alone in the whirlwind of events. My liquored heart threw off the shadow of sorrow, and I saw a new opportunity emanating from this woman. Perhaps she was searching for romance like me.

“I bought her two drinks of whiskey and we talked, but I was clumsy and had no social graces. I did not know how to flirt with her, let alone how to embrace or kiss her. I knew only a literary love from the books I had read, and the movies I had seen, I had never had the opportunity to view the physical manipulations involved in the game of love.”

“You claim you were naïve, innocent and timid,” Zaynon said. “What if you had not been so? You probably would have stripped off her clothes and made love to her in front of everyone at the bar!”

“We left the bar and walked to the deck, finding it empty. The passengers were huddling below to avoid the chilling wind. It was almost completely dark with only the soft moonlight providing any illumination to the deck. I kissed her and she laughed. Immediately, a thousand fears flooded my mind, sapping my confidence. Maybe she was laughing at my inadequate style? I was afraid that I was the butt of a private joke.

She said, "It seems to me that you have never kissed a woman in your life. You weren't kissing me; you were eating my lips." She laughed again and pulled me close, enveloping me. Closing her eyes she put her lips to mine and kissed me. "Like this," and she kissed me several times. I kissed her back but still felt awkward. She repeated her instructions with great patience.”

“Never one of the men I made love to,” Zaynon said, “bothered to teach me anything about romance in spite of their long experience in this field.”

“Please, Zaynon!” Jamil said angrily, “You know this kind of talk disgusts and nauseates me.”

“I am sorry my friend, I only wanted to tease you. Please continue.”

“My emotions were boiling, and I felt my only release to be in intercourse, so I pushed her down to the deck. She gave me no sign of resistance, so I took this as a sign of compliance and slid my hands under her dress and took a fistful of panty with trembling hands. I was overwrought and excited, but she simply laughed. That night

on the ship-deck, bathed in moonlight, and in the piercing cold, I celebrated my manhood for the first time. In fact I celebrated it three times without taking a breath, and she said that she had never had this kind of sex before in her life. I was transformed into a voracious animal, a monkey, an entire herd of lustful beasts.

“What a horrible feeling!” Zaynon sounded sincere. “I can imagine you were like a stray lamb trying to find a fold because of years of deprivation, rigidity and taboos!” Zaynon trying to philosophize added, “From what I can gather from the people coming to England and from reading the Jordanian newspapers and magazines, the people of our country are less rigidly adhering to the old taboos.”

“I think it will take another hundred years, if it ever does,” Jamil said. “We still hear and read about a relative killing his sister, daughter or cousin, because she had love affairs outside of marriage. They call these honor crimes!”

“Yes, I have read the same things! It is a shame to kill a human being for having a love affair outside of marriage.”

Jamil returned to his story. “Each time I was fearful the woman would vanish; hence my fervent desperate, energy. It was as if I wanted to compensate on that single night for my last twenty-four years.”

“Hallelujah ! Hallelujah ! My good friend Jamil finally got into the fold!” Zaynon said.

“At five o’clock in the morning we left for our rooms. We spent the next ten days of the trip sleeping by day and making love at night on the deck. We couldn't use either cabin as they housed other passengers. After each time that I slept with her, my desire was re-fueled, and I became increasingly dependent on her. Don't laugh at me, my good friend, if I tell you that every time I thought of our coming separation at the end of the trip and that I might never see her again, I feared I was about to lose my mind and run amok. I felt that I couldn't live without her. All of my being and thinking was transferred to sex; it was all concentrated on what was between her legs.”

“I think, my friend, that your behavior is very abnormal,” Zaynon said.

“Often I felt that I would simply explode when I succumbed to the ferocious passion I felt for her. Was the reason due to the fact that I was dreaming all my life of sex and she was the first girl I had sex with? I don't know.”

“I know!” Zaynon said, and followed it with a laugh. “You are a sex machine!” Jamil flashed him a fiery look and went on. “As preparations for

disembarking were underway, I imagined being alone without her. This was a fear too great for me to contain, so I ran after her, stopped her, and asked her to marry me. She burst out laughing. Then controlling herself she said, 'I am married and I have a twelve year old boy. He and his father will be waiting for me at the port.'"

"I was shocked. 'You mean to say that we were living in sin for these two weeks and committing adultery?' I asked.

"Again she burst out laughing. 'You moronic Arab! You retarded Muslim! Those two words became obsolete many years ago. Wake up!' Then she turned, presenting to me her back, abruptly ending the conversation."

"According to Aminah Dahshan's religious law, you committed adultery as soon as your lips touched hers," Zaynon giggled, and "maybe even the moment you set next to her and talked with her!"

Jamil did not comment. He continued. "When I talk to a beautiful girl in America, regardless of whether she is married, single, or has a boyfriend or not, I admire something in her--her body, her speech, her faithfulness to her partner, maybe her intellectual mind, or even her resistance to the temptation of sleeping with me! This admiration sparks my infatuation and I must have her . . . at least one night.

Some girls, of course, refuse. But God granted me a powerful gift of persuasive logic. I throw my soul into conversation and my lips appear to speak from the most sincere and truthful depths of my heart. Once I convince a girl to spend time with me on an intellectual level, the gate to her body is easily unlatched, and I can be physically free with her. Believe me, Zaynon, for I am telling the gospel truth. When I say that I like a woman, I really admire her and my obsession for her is overwhelming. I am never acting. You know how sensitive and honest I am. And you know, as I do, how long we were deprived of love, and crave it."

"I believe if a man loves a woman, I mean true love," Zaynon said," he would love her for at least several years, not just for months or a few days, like you do."

"You are right, Zaynon, but I can not help it. I hate it." Jamil said. "But I have no control over it! It makes me sad and very unhappy--miserable!" After pausing a minute and swallowing his saliva he continued, "Sometimes I wonder whether I am as I am because of seeing my uncle Mohammad beating my brother, yelling and threatening us children and humiliating mother by telling her to go back to her widowed mother and give us children to him to be his servants."

"No doubt your uncles were ruthless," Zaynon said

“Yes, they were,” Jamil answered. “They left scars in my conscience, wounds in my soul and a bleeding heart.”

“What always puzzled me, Jamil, is why they treated your family in that manner,” Zaynon said. In our religion, and I am sure in every religion, when a wife loses her husband and has children, the grandfathers, the uncles and the close relatives look after them and they help them until they are old to care for themselves.”

“Our uncles, may God send them to the deepest hell, did the opposite,” Jamil said. “They ripped us from our property.”

“That was in the past; you must forget it,” Zaynon said, “Hatred and spite harm the heart of the bearer not the hated person.” At this point Zaynon took a large gulp of whiskey and gazed at his friend’s face intently as if he were trying to enter his mind and see what kind of brain he had!

Jamil also took a large gulp of whisky but avoided looking at his friend’s face! “I have a very bad habit. It bothers me a great deal. Believe me, Zaynon, I hate it very much, and I have always wished that I could get rid of it. It makes me very unhappy. Sometimes I hit my head on the wall and keep hitting it until the blood gushes out! When I fall in love with a girl, I love her with all my being. I become obsessed with her and think of no other woman but her. Yet after two to three months I begin to hate her just at the point when she truly begins to love me in return. It is at this point that I leave her and look for a new woman.”

“You are sick, my friend--really sick!” cried Zaynon.

“Are not we all sick, my friend? Sick! Just sick! I think the long deprivation and strict religious rules have created this quirk in my nature and emotions. I yearn to live a normal life like anybody else, but I cannot live without love. It must be constantly available in my life. Without love I feel dead. I cannot think nor even talk. I feel that without love I am a futile old man who is simply waiting for death. Love is the nourishment that sustains me. I am always starving, and the more I eat, the more I desire. I want to sleep with every beautiful girl I meet. I mentally dress and undress her and picture her body, all because of my long starvation.”

“In spite of the fact that I have no experience of being in love with a woman,” Zaynon said, “I believe strongly that you are confusing love and sex. I think you are a sex maniac.”

Jamil once again ignored his friend’s comment and continued talking.

"Zaynon, it is the curse of religion and society that harries me emotionally. May Allah curse the dogmatic, ignorant, narrow-minded teachers of our religion! They have distorted the beautiful image of our faith by attributing it to many of their own bad habits and behaviors. They tie all of our values, ethics, and morals to the man's penis and the woman's vagina. The American and the European societies are so free that anyone can practice whatever he wants.

"Zaynon, I am incapable of love; my heart is always bleeding. There is a big hole in my heart that cannot be filled by one woman's love. Every time I recollect my childhood taboos--'this is right, this is wrong; 'this is unethical;' 'this sends you to hell'-- the more I grow to hate them, reject them, rebel against them. They are a part of life that must be challenged and not served blindly. They are signposts for the things I must struggle against."

"There aren't enough powerful and expressive words in the dictionary of any language to express the full extent of my disgust, repulsion, and anger with you." Zaynon's head shook in dismay and his body quivered as the words gagged and choked in his throat with the intensity of his anger. "I feel I am in a dream, and what I hear from you is unreal. I refuse to believe what my ears are telling me. But when I am convinced that what I am hearing is the truth, then I feel the bile in my stomach churn and I want to retch and vomit. I lose my mind every time I think of what you are doing." Zaynon downed a tumbler of pure whiskey, gasping.

"Believe me, Zaynon, I understand your feelings and I sympathize with the suffering you are experiencing," Jamil said, he too reflexively downing his tumbler of whiskey. "But the feeling of disgust and loathing you find towards me now, I felt towards you four years ago, when I saw you, my special friend, the twin of my heart and my soul, bugging an old man who was more than sixty-five years old, well into the age of decay!"

"We always come back to that old damn story!" Zaynon raged in fury, leaping from his chair and adding, "Oh my brother! I am queer, abnormal! I confess! Do you want me to print it in the newspapers? Do you understand? I am queer; it means I am a freak. This is how God created me. It is not of my making and I have no control over it, nor can I change it. I am not ashamed of it. I could tell it to everybody here, and he or she would not think any thing of it, because it is a civilized world. But back home we look down at it, and consider it a shame and disgrace, because we are backward; we are retarded."

"If you want to define who is civilized by their capacity to accept gay love, then I want nothing of it. I will not tell you all of what happened that night; I spent hours roaming the streets as a stray dog until dawn. I was running amok and I was fearful of breaking into insanity," Jamil said.

"I am sorry my friend. I should have told you about what you call my abnormality before you saw me practicing it," Zaynon replied.

"I have read and heard about men practicing buggery with men of their age or younger, but I never heard nor read about a youth in his twenties practicing buggery with a man the age of a grandfather. This is what confounded me most."

"You don't understand me. This is my deviancy. The only men that I am interested in are over sixty. I see you, Jamil, staring at women's breasts and legs in lust. I also have a fixation, although I am sure it is beyond your conception. I love the way an elderly man's neck is etched with its particular lines and idiosyncratic folds and wrinkles. It inspires me with a feeling that nothing else quite matches."

"Your behavior which puzzled me and drove me crazy four years ago bewilders me now. Why would you not let me have a romantic relation with one of those English women? I would pay anything to know the reason!" When Zaynon ignored the question, Jamil did not push it further.

"Would you believe me, Zaynon, when I tell you I was putting my hand on my heart, because I was so afraid and nervous that you would find Amanda's father attractive when we first met?" Jamil's nose wrinkled in disgust and he shivered as if caught in a cold, putrid wind. Then he continued. "You are right; I'm disgusted by your attraction to old men. Those lines in their necks make me think of a wild pig's neck in spite of the fact that I may like the man very much and see that he is blessed with aristocratic qualities. For this I give many thanks to Allah. Otherwise we would be in two disasters instead of one."

"Anyhow," said Zaynon, his face glaring with an ill-disguised look of disgust, "we will drop the subject and return to your problem."

"You consider it a problem," Jamil said, "but I consider it an incident."

"I never imagined that you would stoop to the level of..." Zaynon was unable to finish, for he started to stutter.

Jamil calmly suggested, "Villainy, depravity, cowardly, baseness or perhaps even unprincipled sordidness, a debauched poltroon? Why can't you say it bluntly? Don't mumble and hide what you really feel!"

"As much as it hurts me to say this, you didn't use enough words to describe the absolute lowness you have reached in the depths of evil depravity." Zaynon took a long pull on his whiskey, emptying the tumbler as if it were about to be stolen from him.

"Your actions make me rage. I never expected that it would come to this after all those happy weeks we spent together," Zaynon said, "You lied and deceived Amanda in an outrageous manner. Where do you find that nauseating skill?"

"How could you tell her to return home and pass the happy word among friends and family that she plans to leave for America in two weeks where she shall be married when it is just a story you have concocted, a coldly calculated plan giving you time to escape back to America alone. What will she say to her friends and family after your criminal escape? Imagine the loss of face and embarrassment to which she will be publicly subjected. How will she ever face them again? That is of greater concern to me than breaking her heart and destroying her life."

"It is her problem, not mine, to find a solution for it."

"Oh yes, in your stories, the hero always manages to coolly escape his problems," Zaynon's words burned with sarcasm.

"Say what you like about me. But I am not going to marry her. I have told you over a thousand times that I am not the marrying type. I am an adventurer, pleasure seeker and scoundrel. I search for new opium every few months. I tire of women quickly, after a few months."

"You are abusing your life, Jamil; it lies littered with wasted days, months and years."

"On the contrary, I impress every second of my life with a startling clarity of pure, pleasurable value. I enrich it with thousands of new meanings. This kind of life gives me great pleasure and happiness. It gives my life depth and meaning."

"You are sick, my friend! Sick! Sick! Sick!" Zaynon's ire was fully ignited.

"How truthful! Aren't we both?" Jamil carried a smug look on his face. "I am addicted to this life and cannot live any other way. Believe me, Zaynon, my good friend!"

When Zaynon failed to reply, Jamil added, "Trust me my friend; I searched painfully for an adequate solution, but no other answer than this was satisfactory."

Zaynon rose from his chair smarting from Jamil's words. "Oh Allah in heaven, I seek your mercy and forgiveness. What solution in the world could be worse than

this one! If you had used a gun to put a bullet between her eyes, it would have been an easier remedy than the pain you will put her through now.”

Zaynon tore at his face in despair. "The poor girl! My heart is breaking in sadness for her. God is my witness. If my life would prevent this tragedy, I would not hesitate to offer it to her on a silver platter.”

"You are overacting my friend, exaggerating events. The whole case is much simpler than you think.” Jamil casually replied. His careless and off-hand answer drew the wrath of Zaynon and he went wild. He grabbed an expensive vase close by and with violent strength cast it to the floor. The pieces scattering into every corner of the sitting room were accompanied by a piercing yell which bruised his lungs. Jamil did not doubt that the neighbors had heard all this.

"You are saying your action is less problematic than I think? I wouldn't be at all surprised if I heard that Amanda become insane or committed suicide.”

"Suicide is a coward's act, and Amanda is a courageous girl. She will face her destiny bravely,” Jamil answered.

"Answer me, Jamil, and don't avoid the question. What would Amanda say to her parents and her friends?"

"It is normal. People get married and divorced every day.”

Zaynon rebutted, "Have you thought she might be pregnant?"

Jamil was slightly ruffled by the idea, but he shook his head and said, "I don't think so.” He looked at Zaynon with a somewhat horrified expression, one which he had never given him before.

"Has she suggested any such thing to you?"

"Yes, she hinted to me that she might be pregnant.”

"Why the hell didn't she tell me then?"

"Maybe she didn't want to disturb you, or she might have wanted to surprise you with the happy fact,” replied Zaynon rather snidely.

"I don't care if she is pregnant or not. The problem is hers, and the case is finished, my good friend. You just relax.”

"No, the problem has just begun.” Zaynon approached his friend, cutting the air furiously with his hand. When Jamil remained silent, he continued, "I thought that her great love for you cured you of these sicknesses and rid you of that evil residue from your religious and social upbringing.”

Jamil began to get angry. "I have told you a thousand times that I am not the marrying type. This is my nature. You told me that you have no control of your behavior, and I tell you the same. I cannot get rid of what is in my blood. If I stay with her another month, I will hate her. And if I marry her now, I will divorce her before the three months are out. Believe me, this is in her own best interest."

"How clever you are at twisting the truth, and always for your sake. Oh God, you destroy her life and claim it is for her own good." Jamil noticed that tears had begun to form, clinging to his eyelashes, and Zaynon's eyes had reddened.

Suddenly Zaynon burst into hysterical laughter. "Who would believe that this person sitting in front of me is Jamil Dahshan, that gentle, good-hearted angel I knew back home? Who would believe that his pure, innocent, good-hearted nature would change after four years in America, to a garbage can of moral filth, rotting infamy, and sordid-leftovers?" Zaynon choked and swallowed. "I would have paid with my life in order to keep that beautiful, clean, pure, picture I held of you, my friend. If your mother heard this, her heart would seize immediately and quit beating rather than claim you as her son."

"This is the high penalty we pay to change our skins, and leave our beliefs behind to adopt a new identity," Jamil said.

"But it is not necessary for a person when moving to another culture to change his skin and beliefs. This is an insult to your native country!" Zaynon said.

"I am not sorry I have done this. As a matter of fact, I am thrilled to death. Your friend, Jamil Dahshan, was living in a shell. The backward and foolish people back home call this shell ethical and moral. In the Western World they even consider it elevated and sanctified. What insanity! Your friend left his shell and discarded it, but not before pissing all over it. Now he is living the life that should be lived by a mature and fully-ripened person."

"Alas! Alas! How distressed I am! I had a dear friend, but he has died." During his expressions of regret, Zaynon poured himself a third glass of whiskey.

"*Allah yrhamoh*" said Jamil. "May God intercede on behalf of his soul! He was once a religious, noble, zealous friend, possessing all the good qualities."

"Why don't you say he was stupid and naive, an apathetic dolt, a simpleminded sucker, a backward moron?" Zaynon retorted

Jamil got up and poured himself a vodka and orange juice. Returning to his seat he said in a saddened voice, "I am sorry that I disappointed you, my good friend. Believe me, I expected this outcome from the beginning."

"Why didn't you try to convince her with your famous logic? Why didn't you tell her your problem frankly? She is intelligent, understanding and a wise girl. I am sure she would have understood. But to deal with her using these mean motives and dirty methods is selfish and uncivilized."

"When some people fall in love, their thinking is distorted and their logic is not always an active and ever-present force," Jamil said. "Amanda is drowning in love that laps gently against the shore of her soul, its cool depths reaching from head to toe. She is filled to capacity. Logic and reasoning will not find a passage to her heart or mind. If I were to use logic, she would refuse to leave and reject entirely any argument I put forward. This way I don't see her tears, nor succumb to her despair when she breaks down."

"Damn it! You never think of anybody except yourself—always thinking of poor Jamil. Your selfishness has blinded you, and your egotism has caused you to lose your reasoning."

"Please Zaynon! Let us stop here. We have prostituted our friendship enough," Jamil said sharply.

"But why didn't you stop her from writing to her fiancée that she had fallen in love and planned to marry another man? At least he would be waiting for her after you left her. That would offer her some comfort."

"Don't worry. He will always be there. He loves her dearly and will forgive her. Believe me, Zaynon, he is the only human being on earth who is good enough to deserve her! They are both very good people!"

Zaynon paused for a while; then he spoke as though it were an afterthought, "I wouldn't be at all surprised if you were to come to me and say that you have left her free for Paul out of your gallantry, zeal and desire. . . as though it were your sacrifice that gave her the freedom to marry her fiancée."

Jamil's eyes grew larger and he opened his mouth in amazement, struck by inspiration. "You got it, my friend, you got it! Come to think of it, maybe I had a hidden motive of which only my subconscious was aware. Perhaps the real truth was that I really wanted Paul to marry her!"

Zaynon looked toward heaven and said, "Oh Allah, have mercy on me! I am running amok!" He jumped from his chair, and with both hands hit his head. His brain couldn't take more of his friend's twisted thoughts. He opened the door and went into the garden. He wanted to fill his lungs with fresh air. Jamil's thoughts had polluted the air inside the room. He returned to the living room after about ten minutes. During this time Jamil had moved his luggage from his room and put it next to the front door.

"Amanda likes you very much, Zaynon, and respects your opinion highly. Would you do me a great favor by calling her this evening, explaining everything to her and apologizing on my behalf?"

Zaynon sized up his friend for a long time, his eyes showering fiery sparks. He wanted to burn his friend at the stake! "You are *Majnun* insane and thoughtless. I will not sleep tonight in Oxford. I will spend all next week in the country side at a friend's house. I don't want her to telephone and find me here. The shame and humiliation I would feel at having to speak to her would be too great. It would smother me!"

"In that case, I will write her a note from the airport, and she will receive it tomorrow when I am far on my way to California."

"Do that, little boy. How generous and thoughtful you are!" Zaynon said in blazing sarcasm, and started carrying Jamil's luggage to his car.

"Why don't I take the train and save you the trouble of driving me to the airport. You are physically and emotionally exhausted." Jamil stood firmly in front of the car blocking Zaynon's path.

"I took the day off to take you to the airport. Let's go." Zaynon pushed Jamil from his path.

During the trip between Oxford and the airport on Heathrow, the two men remained silent without a single word passing between them. The horrible deserter noticed that his friend's tears never ceased from the time that they left the house to the point where he could no longer see Zaynon as he entered the terminal.

Jamil's plane departed from Heathrow. By the time it had reached cruising altitude and leveled out, they were flying over Ireland. As he looked down, Jamil saw the green rolling hills with shadows of clouds scuttling over the grass and was entranced by the majesty and beauty of the landscape. The Irish soil had

celebrated its fertility with this ethereal display of green foliage and scattered sprays of wild flowers.

Inspired, he found a pen and some paper and began a letter to Zaynon. The panoramic scene inflamed his emotions and all his being started boiling! His tears began falling, and then he started sobbing. He lowered his head behind the seat, covered his face with a handkerchief so his neighbors wouldn't hear him, and sobbed for several minutes before bursting out crying. After he had stopped crying and dried his tears, he began wondering whether he was sick or cursed.

Dear Zaynon:

We have fulfilled the dreams of our two widowed mothers, satisfying their appetite for the success of their two sons. God has answered their humble supplications and graced us with high education and positions of high standing. You are a director at a big British Museum, while I am a professor at a distinguished American University. We both command and carry with us a respect that showers honor on our families.

Despite all of this, we have not yet fulfilled the entirety of their desires. Neither of us has married and we have little expectation of raising families. By producing no righteous progeny, we have not insured our families name against the generations!

I am still a vagabond, dancing between the arms of coquettish girls of every nationality and from every creed. I break their hearts and they break and pierce my heart time after time. I run after a girl, and she escapes from me; but another girl runs after me, and I escape from her. We dance this futile pantomime over and over, as if there is a curse, and the piercing evil eye stares a hole between my shoulder blades.

I am predestined to running, chasing and being chased. I escape from one curse only to adjust myself under the influence of some strange star. I escape from one disaster to be struck by several more. The sooner I am able to conquer a girl's heart and body, the sooner she provokes a feeling of nausea and disgust within me. I throw her into the trash can of memories, and straight away comb the woods in the hunt for a new girl.

We also have disappointed the hopes of our mother-country. Instead of serving our country and aiding it, gracing it with the fruits of our education, we have turned our backs on it and contributed our talents to countries that have oppressed and enslaved our people, torturing them with frustrations and self-interest, whipping us with fire-brands, and pressing hot coals against our pride.

Our great ambitions were transformed to curses, and we cannot sleep through restless frustration. Being born into our society and culture was like being struck by lightning. It was a curse and twisted our dreams. Nevertheless, if I had been asked to choose my destination, I would not have chosen any other path but the one allocated to me by Allah. And I would not accept being anyone but the son of the widowed woman whose patience and tolerance were beyond description.

There are very many times when I am overwhelmed by burning loneliness and dreadful homesickness. Sometimes I lock my apartment door, shutting myself off from the world. I sit and drain one cup of drink after another to the sound of Arab music on the stereo. I begin to weep until my flood of tears drowns the whole universe in their joyless depths and they have wiped away any presence of the human race, who inherited the universe from our father Adam, who in turn inherited it from God.

Most sincerely and longingly!

Jamil

Chapter 22

A week later, after arriving in California, Jamil sat down and wrote two letters, one to Amanda, and one to Zaynon. He offered an explanation for his actions and sent the letters to probe how they were feeling towards him. Their answer was blunt; neither person chose to write back. One evening he telephoned Oxford, but Zaynon responded to his voice with anger and harshness saying, "There is no one here by that name. You must have the wrong number," and put down the receiver.

Jamil thought that for some reason, Zaynon had been unable to recognize his voice. He called again and Zaynon answered. Jamil said quickly, "Hello Zaynon! This is Jamil Dahshan. How are you?"

Again Zaynon said, "I'm sorry. No one by that name lives here, as I told you before. Don't bother me again." But this time the anger in his voice was evident, and he hung up.

The down hearted fellow came to the sad realization that Zaynon had recognized his voice but had no desire to talk to him because he was still very angry and had not forgiven him! Jamil felt sad, insulted and humiliated for the first five minutes. But after reflecting on Zaynon's response, he shrugged his shoulders and cursed his friend in Arabic in a very loud voice as though he wanted to be sure that Zaynon in Oxford in the United Kingdom could hear him, "*Saheeh innak jahsh! La deeze!* Indeed you are an idiot! Get lost!"

Summer vacation had ended and the new semester had begun. The young professor drowned himself in his books and lecture notes. His memories of Zaynon and Amanda faded rapidly with the frenetic pace of his studies. In the meantime he was struggling with new emotional stresses. He had met a young married lady with similar features and qualities to Amanda. She was tall and slim with blond hair and blue eyes. She possessed an elegant and sophisticated sense of fashion, and of course, a huge intellectual pride. She was a Ph.D. student in the Middle Eastern Studies Department, and Jamil became acquainted with her while guiding her to some subject references.

She occupied his mind and controlled his emotions with her considerable knowledge and deep appreciation for literature and art. She was also elegant, compassionate, and loaded with sex appeal! He tried to be friendly with Brenda Kilmartin, but she always refused his invitations. She cordially agreed to see him in the lecture hall or his office to discuss her thesis, but would never accept his invitations to lunch or to have a cup of coffee, making him furious and frustrated.

One day he entered his office in very low, downhearted spirits and found a letter on his desk which the secretary of his department had delivered. He turned the letter over and saw that it was from the United Kingdom with only his name and the University's address written on the outside. It read like a telegram.

"Your insurgents killed Paul, and I got rid of our son. I don't want him to have a vile and depraved father. Amanda."

Jamil was struck to the core, he stood for several minutes, his eyes frozen, staring blankly at the words of the letter. He felt the earth quake, the world turn upside down, and the horizons spin. He fell heavily onto the couch. He had no recollection of how long he lay there, but it felt like forever. Eventually he rose and left his office, walked in a daze to the car, and headed back to his apartment. Reaching the security of its walls, he fumbled with his stereo, trying to load a cassette. The cassette he inserted held a collection of songs by one of the greatest Lebanese singers, 'Majidah Arroomi' which was sung in the Jerash festival in his homeland. The album had been given to him as a gift by one of his Lebanese female students a month earlier. She had bought it especially for him when she was last on holiday at home.

Jamil opened a bottle of 'Dimple Whiskey' and methodically worked to empty it. His emotions were alight, and the song fanned the flames. He burst out crying at the top of his voice, hitting his head against the wall. He kept doing that until he saw with his own eyes his blood gushing out! He charged around and around the apartment like a wounded bull or a bleeding lion, and eventually exhausting himself fell to the ground where he lay motionless.

He lay in this state until the following evening when visited by Mr. & Mrs. Sheppard who were shocked at his condition. They had been telephoning him since the previous afternoon. When no one answered, they grew increasingly concerned and worried since they normally would see or communicate with Jamil daily. As soon as the Sheppard s entered Jamil's apartment, he burst out crying hysterically again. While Mrs. Sheppard was wiping the blood from his forehead with alcohol, she tried

to discover the reason for the blood, and for his crying. Her efforts were unavailing as she received only more sobbing and streams of tears.

The wounded chap's continuous sobbing and self-mutilation disturbed her so much that she began to weep as well. Deep down she struggled to find out what could bring such grief and self-hatred. She had seen Jamil in this state before when he caught her in the arms of one of her husband's colleagues, but there was no bloodshed then nor was his distress as awful as it seemed to be this time. She felt the only way to comfort him was to make him feel he was not alone in his sad struggle. Her husband saw the two of them and pondered a moment. Jamil, bloodied by his own hands, was writhing in guilty pain and anguish. His wife, standing there in front of this pathetic excuse for a man, was extending her own emotions, offering some sort of comfort in her own sorrow for him.

Dr. Sheppard very likely thought to himself, "What does she hope to gain from this? Why is Jamil so upset? What news or ailment could possibly have infected him and made him feel this bad?" The worried husband probably felt a humanitarian need to remove his fragile wife from this horrible situation, and felt embarrassed and sad for the both of them. He began to experience feelings of remorse and sadness and suddenly decided he had to leave or he would succumb to this horrible side of human nature himself.

Chapter 23

Letters began storming Professor Jamil Dahshan from all over Jordon: from his mother, brother, sisters, their husbands, and children; from his relatives, his friends, even from Moses. All of them were asking, urging and begging him to return to his homeland, Jordon. They all reminded and impressed upon him that Jordon, not America, needed his education, and Jordon, not America, had nursed him with its milk. Now that he was grown and capable of giving, he should give to Jordon, not to another country; to his own people and not to foreigners. He must benefit the country which nursed him with its love and devotion.

They also reminded him, in case he had forgotten, that his brother was alone in this life and had no support coming to him physically, morally, emotionally or financially, and needed him to stand by him. In addition to that, his mother was advancing in age and becoming weaker every day and wanting to see him and enjoy her motherhood before passing away.

“My dear friend Abdulazid is a very close friend to the dean of the university, Dr. Naseraldein,” Jamil’s brother Karim wrote to him one day. “And our relative Ghazi now is the head of the Department of *Al-mokhbarat* homeland security which refused your application to teach in the university several years ago. Both men welcome your return warmly since you have taught in America, are engrafted in its culture and practiced in its democracy.”

After considering all these circumstances, Professor Jamil Dahshan was convinced that he should return to his country to be a hero in the eyes of his family, his tribe and his countrymen. He resigned his position at the University of California and said farewell to his colleagues, friends and students. When he returned to Jordan, Professor Dahshan was warmly welcomed and highly respected by every single member of his family, friends and acquaintances. He was greeted with open arms by many mothers who were hoping and praying to the Almighty that this young man with a bright and prosperous future would be a suitor to their daughters and become their son in law.

“Praise be to Allah! He has answered my prayers,” *Umm* Yosef, one of the neighbors, said when she came with her son Yousef to congratulate Jamil on his return from America. “Every time I saw one of your uncles carrying his stick and

coming either to beat your brother, to humiliate all of you, or to threaten to kick your mother from the house when you were little children, I always prayed to God to quicken the day when you and your brother would become grown up youths and could stop the tyranny and oppression of your uncles. That day has come,” *Umm Yosef* said

“Thank you, *Khalti Umm Yosef*. You were always a great help and big condolence to mother,” Jamil said. “It was a nightmare! Thank God it’s over.” Then he looked at her and asked, “How is *Abu Yosef*, and what has your son Yosef been doing?”

“*Abu Yosef*, as you know, is a very old man and continuously in bed. Otherwise he would have come with us,” *Umm Yosef* said. “Now our son Yosef alone is planting the small piece of land we own and caring for the cow and the few goats.”

“Did he ever go to night school to learn how to read and write?”

“He is too old for that,” *Umm Yosef* said. “He has two children now, a boy and a girl. He married too late because we couldn’t afford the dowry of the girl. They insisted on having a lot of jewelry and many other things.”

“ No excuse for Yousef not to attend the Wipe out Illiteracy program in the evenings to learn to read and write.”

“Not every woman possesses the determination and will power to that your mother had to send her sons to school,” *Umm Yosef* said proudly.

“I wish she had sent my sisters to school too.”

“Very few parents thought to send their boys to school. How could they think to send their daughters?”

“It is a shame!” Jamil said. “Indeed it is a shame!”

In less than one month after returning to Jordon, Jamil was a professor at the University of Jordon making all the people who knew him very happy and proud of him. In less than four months, Professor Jamil Dahshan received a storm of advice from all his relatives and acquaintances, especially Moses who was by then a successful and famous merchant in the capital. They insisted that he should complete the second half of his religious obligations by getting married.

“The Muslim is not considered complete unless he gets married, establishes a family and has children,” Moses said while dancing with his right hand in the air. “A pure and religious Muslim who prays five times a day, pays tithes, goes on pilgrimage to Mecca and gives charity to the poor has fulfilled only the first half of the demands of his religion. The second half is fulfilled when he gets married.” Moses shifted the magazine from his right hand to his left and added, “When you do that, the Almighty will be pleased and satisfied and you will be qualified to enter *Aljannah* paradise.”

Jamil smiled at his friend’s philosophy and thanked him. Everybody told Jamil how happy, peaceful and tranquil he would become, especially after the birth of little ones who would fill the house with joy and pleasure. He fought fiercely not to give in, since he was planning never to get married due to his belief that he was incapable of marital responsibilities, but he found himself raising the flag of surrender.

Professor Jamil Dahshan had been a faculty member at the University for only a short time when a very important event took place that turned his life upside down. He had just left his office after finishing his last lecture for the day and had walked to the bus stop. He didn’t drive as many of his associates did, but that didn’t bother him. In fact, he enjoyed taking the bus. He never knew when someone new and exciting might sit down beside him or he might see something totally unexpected out the window. Today, however, fate was waiting for him at the bus stop, not on the bus--fate, that is, in the guise of Professor Dalal Zaydan, one of his colleagues, accompanied by two young ladies. Jamil was sure the girls were students based on the huge number of books they each were carrying.

“Professor Dahshan, may I introduce my daughter, Samirah, and her friend, Grace. They have been close friends since first grade and both graduated from Nazareth Secondary School. Now they’re here together at the University, majoring in social studies and both will graduate this summer. As you might imagine, with the girls spending so many years together, I’m a close friend of Grace’s mother.”

Jamil smiled and gently shook Samirah’s hand. When he turned to extend the same courtesy to her friend, what he saw both amazed and puzzled him. The girl opened her handbag, took out a handkerchief, and wrapped it around her right hand before extending it to him.

“Why do you do that?” Jamil asked in amazement. “My hand is clean and I have no contagious disease.”

“Your touch would weaken the power of my prayers. It would invalidate my ablution. Also, I am fasting.”

“There are still several months to go before the fasting month of Ramadan is upon us. Why do you fast now?” Jamil questioned.

“Because today is Monday. In addition to the month of Ramadan, I fast the six white days, and Monday and Thursday of every week as well as the sacred days.”

“Oh, my God! You must have committed a huge number of sins for which you want the Almighty to forgive you to fast so many days each year,” Jamil said jokingly.

“Do we have to be sinners in order to love and worship the Almighty God?” Grace asked, a touch of anger shading her voice. Glancing at her face, Jamil noticed her cheeks were pink with suppressed anger.

“Of course not,” Jamil replied soothingly. “But I know this kind of worship is usually practiced by older people like those of my mother’s generation, not by a young lady in the full bloom of youth like you.”

“Not only is Grace a committed Muslim, but her mother and her grown-up sisters are very devout as well,” interjected Mrs. Zaydan.

“Oh, how nice!” Jamil answered glad to be given an opportunity to change the subject. “How many sisters do you have in that bouquet of flowers?”

“There are seven of us girls,” said Grace.

“Great! Thanks be to Allah. I am sure your mother will be happy to have seven sons-in-law to pamper and love her” answered Jamil. “Is there a son?”

“Yes, I have one brother. He’s three years old,” Grace confirmed.

“Grace’s mother refused to use birth control until she had a baby boy,” Mrs. Zaydan said. “An Arab wife does not feel secure with her husband unless she has at least one son, you know.”

“I think the reason behind that is that the Arab man knows that if he does not have a male to carry on his name after his death, his name will be obliterated and forever forgotten,” Professor Dahshan said.

”It is true; because when the daughter gets married, she changes her maiden name to her husband’s name and her father’s name becomes an empty echo,” Professor Zaydan added.

Here Miss Samirah Zaydan interrupted, stating, “Alas! We are nowadays copying the Western World. I will never allow my husband to cancel my family name

to replace it with his. When I get married, I will proudly keep my father's name. I feel I am honored, lucky and privileged to be the daughter of Dr. Farhan Mansur Zaydan, one of the top people in economics, not the wife of so and so. He is one of the most renowned, well-respected economists in the country."

Her mother laughed and said "My daughter, Samirah, is very independent and no one in our family or in our circle of friends can challenge her." She paused a moment and added, "She tells this to everyone she meets. Since she's the only child we have, her father treats her like a boy and gives her a lot of freedom."

The girl smiled happily and proudly.

"What do you girls do?" Jamil asked Grace, He was eager to continue to conversation. For some reason, he couldn't bear the thought of watching them walk away.

"My oldest sister is studying medicine at Podova University in Italy. She plans to become a pediatrician. I am the second born. The third sister is studying biology and the fourth is studying English literature. Both of them are here at the university."

"What about the other three?"

"They are still in elementary and secondary school," she said.

"The seven daughters, all of them, have attended the same school, Nazareth Secondary School," Mrs. Zaydan said.

"God help your father," Jamil said. "He must pay a lot of money to send you girls to private school."

"Our parents determined from the beginning to provide us with the best possible education available," replied Grace.

"I think they succeeded. My brother's daughter also attends Nazareth and he told me it is the very best school for girls in the country. "

"Oh! Perhaps my sisters know your niece," Grace suggested politely.

"I doubt it," answered Jamil with a smile. "My niece is very little; she's only in the first grade."

"Yes, it is definitely a first-class school, although quite strict since it is run by nuns. That is the reason I sent my daughter there. I knew she would get an outstanding education," agreed Mrs. Zaydan.

“I see you are wearing black clothes, Miss Grace,” Jamil observed. “Black looks very flattering on you. It makes you look beautiful and glamorous. Black seems to be the latest in fashion trends.”

“Jamil,” Mrs. Zaydan spoke softly, but with a distinct trace of sadness in her voice, “Grace lost her father less than a year ago. The clothes she wears are for mourning, not as a fashion statement.”

“Oh, I am so very sorry to hear that. Please forgive me and accept my deepest condolences,” replied Jamil.

“Thank you,” Grace said. Jamil couldn’t help but notice the wave of sorrow that crossed Grace’s face as she spoke.

“I am sorry, Jamil,” said Mrs. Zaydan, glancing at her watch. “My next lecture starts in six minutes and the girls need to go to the library. We must say good-bye for now.”

“It was nice to meet you, Professor Dahshan,” the girls said in unison, as they turned and started across the campus. Jamil wished he could join them and go with them to the library, but he did not move from the bus stop. He felt slightly ashamed of himself for even thinking about going with the girls. It wasn’t his usual practice to pay particular attention to any of the students, even the brightest in his own classes.

Several weeks later, Jamil Dahshan again found himself at a bus stop. This time it was the one closest to his home. It was about ten o'clock on a bright, sunny morning and he was late making his way to the university that day. It was such a beautiful day that he had lingered over his morning routine, loath to shut himself inside the university buildings. The bus was parked at the main stop. Since the line kept no fixed time schedule, the driver was waiting a few minutes to see whether anyone would come to fill the vacant seats. After taking one last deep breath of the sweet morning air, Professor Dahshan climbed the steps into the vehicle and took a seat about halfway down the aisle.

He passed several passengers who looked as if they were dozing in their seats. Just as he was making himself as comfortable as he could on his own hard seat, Jamil noticed that something had captured the attention of the driver and the passengers in the front rows. It was as if an earthquake had shaken them awake. All eyes were focused in complete attention on something just outside the bus doors.

Jamil wasn't left in doubt for long as to what had captured his fellow travelers' attention. No doubt it was the stunning beauty of the arriving passenger. Her slender stature, charming features, demure, downcast eyes and exquisite dress combined to awaken them from their slumbers. Jamil recognized the newcomer. It was the same young lady who had been introduced to him by his colleague, Professor Zaydan, a few weeks previously.

He was happy to see her because, no matter how hard he tried, he had been unable to put her out of his mind. Not a single day had passed since their introduction that he hadn't taken the time to walk all over the campus, and especially through the library, hoping he would be lucky enough to run into the beautiful, shy young woman. He wanted his senses to be touched by her elegance and beauty.

He often had a strong desire to ask Professor Zaydan about her, but each time he resisted the impulse. What could he say to his colleague that wouldn't leave him embarrassed and feeling bashful?

Now he felt his patience had been rewarded. The new arrival was definitely the young lady, Grace, standing elegantly at the top of the bus steps like a slim, lofty green, date tree in a barren wasteland. Her eyes searched inside the bus for a moment, and then she stepped forward.

When she passed the first and second vacant seats, Professor Dahshan felt his heart begin to race. He felt happy and lucky because he thought for a moment that the

young lady had chosen to be his partner, since the seat next to him was also vacant. His heart started beating erratically; his tongue dried up in his mouth; his limbs became numb. He wondered how in the world he would find the words to start a conversation with her. What could he say to hold her interest?

To his great disappointment, the alluring young lady kept going without a pause, passing all the vacant seats while keeping her eyes focused on her shoes. She finally sat down in the very last row of seats, sharing the space with three veiled women who were already sitting there. For reasons beyond his comprehension, Professor Dahshan became infuriated and very angry. He felt insulted and humiliated. She had walked right past him as if he did not exist.

He was so incensed by her behavior that he spent the bus trip writing speeches in his mind. He mentally delivered one speech after the other to the women of Jordan who were always accusing men of being their oppressors, of not being fair to them, not giving them their equal rights and always looking upon them as the inferior sex. Yet, here he was in the position of wanting to befriend the young girl and spend some time with her, but instead he was being shunned as though he were unclean or unworthy of her attention.

Looking around him, Jamil easily determined most of his fellow passengers were students, based on their ages, the books and briefcases they were carrying, and the easy way they were sitting and talking to each other. They were pretty much an equal mix of males and females. The students were casual and comfortable together, ignoring the rigid rules observed by their more conservative elders that forbid the association of unrelated men and women.

As he watched the easy camaraderie around him, Professor Dahshan's anger continued to grow. By the time the bus reached his final stop on the campus, he felt as if the seat under him had become a bench of burning wood. When he jumped from the bus and hit the paved street, his shoes beat such an angry tattoo on the asphalt that sparks flew from the soles of his shoes. He waited impatiently at the foot of the bus steps for the young lady to reach him. As soon as she began to pass by him, he began speaking in a low voice that only she could hear. As angry as he was, he still didn't want to embarrass her and himself by drawing the attention of the other students around them.

Without looking at her, but very much aware of her presence beside him, he spit out, "On the radio and TV, in magazines and newspapers and lectures, even in the

streets, on every occasion you women only talk about the rights denied to you and about the injustice men do you. You accuse us of looking at you as the inferior sex and not treating you respectfully and equally. But you treat a man the same. You are so cold that you won't even sit next to us on a bus. Are you that afraid of us men?"

The young lady uttered not a single word in reply, despite the fact that she had heard every word he said. She stood mutely, staring at her shoes, seeming to allow the words to run off her like a stonewall withstanding the violent gusts of a summer storm.

When Jamil paused for breath, Grace began to turn away from him, still not acknowledging him in any way. He continued to pour out the speeches he'd written in his head during the bus trip, but his lecture was cut short. The distance between the bus stop and the main gate of the university was less than fifty feet, and a great number of students were crowding around the entrance. Despite his anger at the young woman, he did not want to do anything to publicly humiliate her.

"Hey, Grace, here I am!" Jamil heard a female voice calling. When he looked towards the sound, he recognized Samirah Zaydan, his colleague's daughter to whom he'd been introduced the same day he met Grace.

Jamil tried to avoid letting the girl see him, but it was too late. "Hello, Professor Dahshan. How are you?" Samirah greeted him. "It's nice to see you again."

"Hello, Miss Zaydan, it's wonderful to see you again, as well. How come you are here at the university? It is Christmas day and all Christian students have officially been excused from classes." Then he laughed and added, "Or have you become a Muslim?"

"No, I have not," she answered with a laugh. Coming closer to him and shaking his hand, she added, "Tomorrow is the deadline for submitting term papers. I agreed to meet Grace so the two of us could work on our papers in the library." While Samirah was talking, Grace moved a few feet away from them, while still listening to their conversation.

Jamil turned to Grace, as if noticing her for the first time. "Hello, Miss Grace." Professor Dahshan said, looking straight into the girl's face. "How are you today? It's nice to see you again"

Grace, too, chose to ignore the previous few minutes. "I am well, thank you," she replied in a very timid and low voice without leaving her place. Then she added,

addressing her girl friend, “We do not have much time and we have a lot to accomplish at the library.”

Ignoring her friend’s attempts to get them to walk away, Samirah looked at Professor Dahshan with a smile on her face. “I had the chance of meeting some of your female students,” she said. “They are singing your praises.”

“What did I do to deserve such praise?”

“They say you are very daring and liberal in your ideas.”

“Aren’t all the professors like that? We don’t teach anything if we only repeat what has already been thoroughly discussed.”

“No, most professors are afraid of the consequences if they speak out too liberally,” she giggled, then added in a lower voice, “They also say you are awfully handsome and very sexy.”

“You are an astonishing young lady--very bold and out-spoken, if I may say so,” Jamil said.

“Don’t you like us women to be liberal and out-spoken?”

“Of course, I find it very refreshing. But I also like young ladies who are dignified and shy,” he said and looked at Grace, who avoided his look. Then he added, “Why don’t you and Miss Grace join some of my classes next semester, although I recall it is your last semester here at the University.”

“We might consider doing just that,” Miss Zaydan said.

Turning to Samirah and speaking only to her, Grace urged, “Shouldn’t we be going now, please.”

“Okay, girls, it was nice seeing you,” Professor Dahshan replied, taking the hint that they wanted to leave. “I better not keep you any longer. Good luck on your term papers. I have a lecture to attend in a few minutes, anyway so I need to be on my way, as well.”

That said, he shook Samirah’s hand which she’d extended to him, and he waved to Grace who was waiting a few yards away. Forcing himself to refrain from looking back, he headed towards the building where his office was located.

As Professor Dahshan opened the door of his office, he suddenly felt a wave of happiness and tranquility filling every fiber of his being. It was as if the gates of his heart had opened wide, allowing love to rush in and saturate his being for the first time since returning to Jordan.

He thought he should do something about it, take some action to celebrate this miracle. But what should he do? He felt so very strange, inexplicably excited and afraid, warm and cold, all at the same time. He wondered, *is she already engaged to someone else? Is she in love with someone? Could she ever be in love with me?*

Questions beat their wings around his head like ocean waves battering the shore, but he could find no answers. Finally he realized there was nothing he could do at the moment. He decided he must see her again, talk to her and find out whether she, too, felt these same strange sensations along her nerve endings.

Chapter 24

After more than a week of heart-ache and uncertainty spent searching for Grace every day in every corner of the campus, Jamil finally came across her sitting alone in a corner of the library, a large reference book propped in front of her while she concentrated on making notes in her notebook.

“*Assalam Alykom!* May I sit?” he whispered, pointing to the chair opposite of her.

“If you wish,” she said, barely glancing up from her books long enough to acknowledge his presence.

“How did it go with the term papers? Did you get them finished on time?” he asked as he settled into the chair opposite her.

“It was okay,” she answered reluctantly.

“I was going to offer my services, but I was afraid you would not accept them.”

“It was good that you didn’t offer to help.”

“Do you mean you would not have accepted my offer?”

“I don’t accept any help from any one, especially strangers.”

“Not even from me?” he asked jokingly.

She ignored him.

After an awkward pause, Jamil continued. “I’d like to see you after you finish today’s studies.”

“For what reason?”

“I’d like to invite you for a cup of tea, coffee, soda, lemonade, anything.”

“I don’t allow anyone to pay for my drinks.”

“Okay, I will let you pay for mine.”

She shook her head no without any hint of a smile curving her graceful lips.

“All right,” Jamil replied, realizing she wasn’t going to acknowledge his gentle easing. “Each of us will pay for their own drink.”

“I don’t sit with strangers.”

“I am not a stranger. And I want to talk to you about something very important. I have the most honorable intentions.”

“Important to you . . . or important to me?”

“Important to both of us.”

“Tell it to my mother, not to me.”

“But it concerns you, not your mother.”

After a pause, he added, “There are certain things in life a man would like to say to a certain woman, not to her mother.”

“So keep it to yourself. I am not interested in hearing them. Anything concerning me concerns my mother. There should be no difference.”

“What I’d like to tell you, I cannot say to your mother.”

”So, keep it to yourself.”

“Are you afraid of me?”

“Why should I be? I just don’t like to talk to a stranger, that’s all,” she said, half in anger, half in frustration at his continued presence.

“Okay, let us go right now and see your mother,” Jamil said. “I know you have no car and I don’t have one, either. We will take a taxi.”

“I won’t ride in a taxi with a stranger.”

“Okay, we will take the bus. Let’s go.”

“I won’t walk to the bus stop with you, either.”

“Then we can walk separately, if you are afraid of students seeing us walking together. We can even take separate seats on the bus, if you insist.”

“I am not afraid of anyone. I just don’t want to,” she stated angrily.

“Well, how can I see your mother if I don’t know her? I can’t very well show up unannounced on her doorstep, can I?”

“I will give you our home telephone number. Call her, ask for an appointment, and if she agrees to meet with you, she will give you the address.” As she spoke, Grace wrote a number on a piece of paper, tore it from her notebook and handed it to Jamil.

Professor Dahshan nodded and took the sheet of paper she handed him. Starting to rise from his seat, he paused. “Before I go to see your mother I would like to ask you a question.”

Grace did not speak, but looked at him as if to say, I’m listening.

“Are you committed?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, with a frown.

“I mean, are you engaged or in love? Promised to someone? Waiting for somebody? Something like that.”

“First of all,” she said, in a provoked voice, “I am not engaged. Secondly, my heart is not a vacuum cleaner to pick up love pretenders and pleasure seekers.” She paused for a moment before adding, “Thirdly, we devout women do not fall in love with any man except our wedded husbands.”

“I noticed you are using the plural ‘we’,” Jamil observed. “Who do you mean by ‘we’?”

“My sisters and I,” she replied.

“I bet your mother taught you that,” Jamil responded.

“Yes she did.”

“And her mother taught it to her as well. The problem with that, Miss Grace, is that I don’t want to deal with anyone but you, in the singular form, not any kind of plural ‘we’.” He grinned as he spoke his thoughts, hoping he wouldn’t make her too angry. He thought about asking if she was planning to teach her daughters the same thing, but stopped from speaking the words out loud. He felt he had pushed her enough for one day.

When she said nothing, Jamil smiled and added, “I’m sorry if I offended you. I did not mean to do so. Thank you for the telephone number.” He rose from his chair slowly, reluctant to take his leave. “Good-bye . . . for now.”

Professor Dahshan realized now that he was dealing with a young lady who was very stubborn and intelligent. She had a strong personality and would not be an easy person with whom to deal, but he was very happy because he believed strongly that she would be a great wife and wonderful mother.

When he telephoned her mother the same evening he felt as if the woman was expecting his call. They both agreed to meet the following day at six o’clock.

When Professor Dahshan returned home from the university that evening, he found the living room packed with people. His four married sisters along with some of their daughters had obviously been there for some time. They were eating and laughing and enjoying themselves immensely. They had come to visit their mother who had lately been making comments about not feeling well and being slightly indisposed. No one really took such comments seriously. Their mother was as strong as an ox and would probably outlive many of them, but she did get lonely now that all

her daughters were married and living in their own homes. Pretending to be in frail health was her way of assuring that they would all visit frequently.

Jamil had hoped to share his good news with his mother in private, but quickly revised his thoughts. Everyone gathered together made the perfect occasion to announce his plans. They would all be so surprised that he had finally decided to get married. “*And,*” he thought, “*I have found exactly the right bride, and this will make them all very happy.*” His entire family had been urging him to settle down and get married ever since his return from America.

After several moments spent trying to get them all to be quiet at the same time, he blurted out his news. “I am getting married.”

“Thanks to the Almighty! He finally guided you to complete the second half of your religion,” his mother said.

“Who is the lucky girl whose charm and beauty convinced my selective brother to marry her?” His older sister, Amirah asked. “Do we know her? Is she from a well-known and distinguished family like ours?”

“I don’t know anything about her family’s fame or distinction,” Jamil replied. “Nor do I care. But I do know about her personality. She is well educated, beautiful, charming and elegant. Her behavior and character are beyond reproach. She is first-class . . . perfect in every way.” Jamil said enthusiastically.

“How do you know her?” sister number three, Ammoon, asked.

Jamil eagerly shared with them every minute detail of his story. He told of the first day he was introduced to her, how he could not get her out of his thoughts for weeks, how angry he’d been when she ignored him on the bus and how he had finally worked up the courage just that afternoon to approach her with his intentions. He, of course, included the fact that she refused to speak with him and sent him to her mother instead.

“This is the right girl to marry,” sister number two, Aaminah, declared. “So many girls nowadays throw themselves on men. They look for any excuse to start a conversation with a man and do anything to draw his attention in order to get him to propose marriage.”

“You were unfair to scold her, my dearest brother. You shouldn’t blame her because she refused to sit next to you. She is a pure and chaste girl. She is a Puritan,” sister number four, Samiha, said. “We all will be very happy if she accepts your proposal to be your wife.”

“We will all love her, said Nawal, Amirah’s daughter.

“I am sure she will love us, too,” said Rema, Samih’s daughter.

“Yes, son! Yes, brother!” the mothers and the sisters chorused simultaneously.

“Is she beautiful, Uncle?” asked Aaminah’s daughter, Kholood.

”She is beautiful, but not as beautiful as you, Sweetheart. “ The little girl was embarrassed at the compliment, so she covered her face with her right arm.

“I was planning to sit with her alone in any place she chose and tell her everything about myself, especially my financial situation, and ask her if she would marry me under those circumstances. But she wanted me to tell her mother what I wanted to tell her,” Jamil said angrily.

“I am sure she accepted the idea of marrying you, but she wanted her mother to make the decision. It is not right that a young girl make such a decision by herself. It is for her elders to decide,” sister Amirah said. His mother and his three other sisters agreed with her.

“Anyhow, you are seeing the mother tomorrow and you will have your answer then,” sister Aaminah soothed.

“If they accept me as a suitor for their daughter, I am afraid they might demand a lot of things from me I cannot provide,” Jamil said nervously. “I have a feeling they are extremely wealthy and I am sure they expect the man who’s going to be a suitor to their daughter to buy her a lot of expensive things. That will require a great deal of money which I do not have.”

“You are mistaken, son,” the mother said. “A wise, decent family will want their daughter’s happiness more than they will concern themselves about material things. I am sure they will try to help you by not demanding unnecessary proofs of your commitment to her.”

“You say that, Mother, because I am your son and you love me, “Jamil said. “Girls nowadays, when they get engaged, require the bridegroom to supply them with many luxurious things: a party in a five-star hotel, for instance, with about a thousand guests; or large amounts of gold jewelry, and fancy clothes; a well-furnished house and more. Things are not as they were in the old days.“

“Ah, my brother! A handsome youth like you with an excellent education and a bright future, a son from a distinguished family, a man so honest and sincere, why

the daughter of the prime minister of Jordan, or the daughter of the chief justice, would kiss your feet if you asked to marry her," sister Amirah teased.

Jamil burst out laughing so hard that tears streamed from his eyes and ran down his face. "You say that, sister, because I am your brother and you know me well, but others don't think so!"

"Do not worry, son," his mother said. "Our Prophet Mohammad, God bless his soul, has said that God will fulfill three desires for a man: to build a house to protect himself and his family from the cold weather and hot sun; to go to Mecca on a pilgrimage to ask God's forgiveness of his sins, and to get married and establish a righteous family to worship Him."

"Shall I ask Karim's wife about Grace and her family?" Jamil asked. "She might know about her family since she went to the same secondary school."

"No, no, no, no," the four sisters said together.

Jamil gazed at them, his wide-open eyes clearly asking them why not.

"Because she is expecting you to marry her sister," said sister Amirah.

"What? What does my brother say?"

"They both think that you will."

"But they know very well that I vehemently oppose relatives marrying."

"He married our cousin and they think you should do the same."

"Anyhow, son, go tomorrow and see what her mother has to say," Aminah urged her son. "I will pray for you and I am sure that Almighty will never fail me."

"We also will pray for you, brother, and wish you all the luck in the world," the four sisters said.

Chapter 25

From the moment Grace's mother agreed to meet him the following day, one idea lodged itself in Jamil's mind. It bothered and puzzled him and, try as he might, he could not come up with an answer that put his fears to rest. How was he going to behave when he met them? He pictured the mother and her six daughters standing in a formal receiving line, all wearing black dresses with black scarves covering their heads and their hands wrapped in black handkerchiefs to protect themselves from him invalidating their ablutions. "However can I find the courage to face something like that?" he asked himself.

The next day the young professor heaved a silent but very hearty sigh when he realized he had spent a sleepless night for no reason. Grace's mother greeted him warmly. Her hair was covered in a fancy black scarf, but the rest of her clothing, while quite proper, was also quite casual. The other members of Grace's family welcomed him very warmly and cordially as well. He felt a torrential wave of happiness mixed with intimacy only a few minutes after meeting everyone. They were the same feelings he had experienced when he met his mother, his sisters and his brother for the first time after his long stay in America. He felt as if he had known Grace's family for years and years.

What impressed Jamil about the mother and the three older daughters, in addition to their beauty and charm, their compassion and simplicity, their gentleness and elegance, was their wide knowledge and general awareness of what was happening in the world from politics, to art, to inventions. They showered him with questions about himself, his family, his plans and his ambitions.

"Since you had a good job and a comfortable life in America, why did you come back to Jordan?" Grace asked him.

"I came back looking for you."

The girl was very embarrassed and lowered her eyes to the floor. The mother and other daughters burst out laughing. "Really, why did you return?" the mother asked.

"When I returned from Egypt, my great ambition was to teach at the University of Jordan," Jamil said. "But I was refused because, at that time, I was a

member of a party that advocates for the unity of the Arab countries. We opposed the ideology of the Jordanian government at that time.”

“Thank God that they are not against it anymore!” answered the mother.

The mother was an outstanding cook and the food she served was so delicious that Jamil thought it was out of this world. He had a wild appetite and consumed more than he had ever eaten at any other meal. In addition to the quality of the food, the quantity was enough to feed more than a dozen people. Around eleven o’clock, Jamil thanked his host for the wonderful and enjoyable evening he had spent in their home and for the delicious food he had eaten.

“You made me exceedingly happy tonight,” he said, addressing the mother. “I am not exaggerating when I tell you that I felt this evening as if I was the oldest brother of your daughters and son. I would like to truly be so. Please grant me the honor of being your son-in-law by giving me Grace’s hand to be my wedded wife.”

The mother spread a charming smile over her bright face. The five sisters laughed and giggled, but Grace left the living room in a hurry and went to her bedroom. The little brother threw himself at Jamil, who embraced him warmly.

“I am sorry, son; I cannot give you the answer now,” said the mother. “We have heard a great deal about your large, distinguished family, but we know nothing about you.”

She returned a lock of her hair back to its place and added, “You know the customs in this country. When a suitor asks for a girl’s hand in marriage and the family doesn’t know him, they speak to the people who do know him before making a decision.”

“Of course, Mother, I know the custom,” Jamil replied.

“So give us a week or so; then telephone me.”

As Jamil rose from his seat and began to shake hands all around, adding a personal good-bye to each woman, Grace’s mother said, “Thank you very much for the bouquet of flowers. It is very beautiful and shows good taste.”

“If I were to gather all the flowers in Jordan and bring them to you in one tremendous arrangement, it would still be insufficient to show my deep respect and appreciation. I thank you for honoring me by accepting me into your lovely home,” said Jamil as he left the home he hoped he would soon visit again.

When Professor Dahshan telephoned the mother a week later to receive her reply, he was pretty sure that she had made the decision to reject him. Her cold voice, unfriendly reply and short answer made him initially decide not to keep the appointment she gave him, but he changed his mind and decided to go, if only to know the reason or reasons behind her rejection of him.

Jamil spent some of his few extra dollars by taking a cab to the appointment rather than taking the much slower bus. If he was to be rejected, he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible. Even so, by the time the cab dropped him in front of Grace's house, he was a burning bundle of fear and worry. He was very much afraid and reluctant to knock on that door. He used every ounce of his self-control to refrain from making his escape and running back home to hide in his room.

The mother received him in the formal living room of her home at the appointed time. As soon as they both sat down, she began, "I have spoken with Uncle *Abu* Hanna. His real name is Elias Abbas. He is in his early seventies and was the oldest friend of my deceased husband, may Allah write his name to be one of the inhabitants of His Paradise. They were friends for more than thirty years, saw each other every single day and had dinner together almost every night."

"Do you mean the Christian gentleman who owns the fancy shop in the heart of town opposite the main post office building?" asked Jamil. "He sells notions to ladies, I believe."

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Not really," Jamil replied. "I haven't had the honor of meeting him, but I've heard a great deal about him from my sisters and my sister-in-law. They buy buttons and lace and such for their dresses from his shop."

"His shop is the only one like it in town," the mother said. "He imports his goods only from the most fashionable cities--Beirut, Rome, and Paris."

"I also heard about him from my brother. I understand he is very well-known and well-respected," Jamil said. "My brother works in the customs department and this gentleman regularly pays customs duties to the government. My brother sings his praises for his honesty, generosity and ethics."

“He is our family’s advisor since the death of my husband. We do not make any decision without consulting him. You could say he is the guardian of my children. He knows and is friends with nearly half the people in the capital. He even knows a large number of your family. He knows your brother and thinks very highly of his honesty and moral character.”

“Thank you, and thank him for praising my brother.”

“Anyhow,” continued the mother. “We asked him about you.”

Jamil’s heart sank and he felt it beating through his eardrums as if they were about to explode. He felt as if his lungs were about to seize.

“He asked several men and women in your family about you, and none of them recommended that we should accept you as our son-in-law.”

“Oh, my God! Am I that evil a person? Did he mention the reasons my family would have said such things?”

“Yes. They said, first of all, that you are penniless. Your salary is the only income you have, and your brother even had to pay for your ticket to come back from America.”

“This is true. At that time my salary was only enough to take care of my needs. That’s the reason I didn’t have extra money. But being poor does not disgrace a man. Money is like fingernails, one day short, the following day, long. Being wealthy or being poor is according to God’s will.”

“I whole-heartedly agree with you, son. All of that did not bother us,” the mother assured him.

Jamil felt himself begin to relax. Perhaps this meeting wasn’t going to turn out as badly as he feared.

“What else did they say?” continued Jamil.

“They said you are a playboy and had many love affairs in America. You would love a girl for a short period of time and then leave her for another after you broke her heart. They said you cannot be trusted, nor can you be faithful to one woman.”

“How do they know that? Were they with me in America?” At this point, Jamil stood up and said, “Excuse me, I must go. Thank you for taking the time to see me. It has been nice knowing you.”

“No, no,” said the mother. “Don’t leave. I haven’t finished yet.” She motioned to him to sit back down. “Uncle *Abu* Hanna did not believe what he was told.”

“Thank God there was one person who defended me,” Jamil said while returning to his seat.

“He also said that even if it was true, we have to forget about it because it was in the past.” When Jamil said nothing, the mother went on. “*Abu* Hanna pointed out that our country, like most in the Middle East, is very strict concerning relationships between men and women. Western countries, like America, are much more casual concerning those same relationships. So, when a young man from our country goes to a Western country, he usually behaves differently with the women there than he would behave with them here.”

“I knew a large number of women over there, students and associates, but they were just friends. It was pure friendship, no romance, no love affairs, believe me,” Jamil assured Grace’s mother, although in his heart he knew he was lying.

“Anyhow, Uncle *Abu* Hanna recommended we accept you as a suitor for Grace and we all agreed with him,” she said, a charming smile spreading over her beautiful face.

“Really?” Jamil’s heart danced with joy. He jumped from his seat and hurried toward the woman, kissed her right hand and brought it to his forehead twice, as was the accepted custom of a younger man showing respect to an older, honored woman.

“Thank you, son! Thank you. You are adorable and charming.”

“Where are they? I mean the girls and their brother?”

“Today is Uncle *Abu* Hanna’s niece’s birthday. He is having a party for her, the mother said. “He issued an invitation for all of our family to attend, but since he knew I was going to see you, he excused me from going.”

“I am very sorry,” Jamil said. “I could have come tomorrow.”

“Don’t apologize, son; I wouldn’t go anyway,” the mother assured him. “We are in mourning. We do not attend any kind of celebration, birthday, wedding or circumcision outside the family for at least one year after my husband’s death. But *Abu* Hanna and his family are considered our family. That is the reason why the girls went.”

“I am at your command, Mother. What do you want me to do now?” Jamil asked, spreading a wide smile over his face and bowing to her respectfully.

“Thank you, son, you are well bred. I am sure you will never fail us.”

“I promise you, Mother, I will be a good husband to Grace. I will love and cherish her.”

“I have no doubt, son,” said the mother. “Now I want to tell you what we have decided . . . Uncle *Abu* Hanna, the girls, and myself.”

“Please do. I am all ears.”

“About you not having money for marriage, necessities, all that . . . It’s not a problem for us.”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” Jamil confessed.

“Thanks be to Allah, Grace’s father left us some money and property,” the mother continued. “We will use part of her share to buy her clothes, pay a year’s rent on a house, buy furniture, and pay for whatever she needs.”

“But it is against our culture for the wife even to participate in buying these things, let alone all of it. It is the husband’s duty to provide.”

“We do not differentiate between the wife and the husband, between the woman and the man. They are both one piece of our hearts.”

“But I will always feel inferior,” Jamil argued. “It is against our customs.”

“You shouldn’t feel inferior,” the mother argued gently. “I am sure one of these days you will have money. Then buy her the things you think will please her. That is all I would ask of you.”

Before Jamil could ask why she thought he would someday be wealthy, she continued. “My heart tells me that you will be wealthy, and also that you will be a faithful husband and devoted father.”

“I promise you I will, as God is my witness,” Jamil vowed fervently. “I will put Grace in my heart and watch over her as I do with my eyes.”

“I believe you, son, I believe you.”

“May I come tomorrow and take her to introduce her to my family?”

“Of course, son, of course! Come at five o’clock. I will telephone the taxi office. It will take you, Grace, and one of her sisters. When you decide to bring her back, telephone me and I will telephone the same taxi. I am sorry if it is awkward, but we deal with only one taxi service. We’ve been dealing with them for more than ten years and we trust them to safely transport our daughters.”

“Of course, it’s not a problem. As you wish, Mother,” Jamil agreed. “But may I add that I will soon be buying a new car for myself. I have spoken with my

brother and he has agreed to help me find one I can afford, even co-signing the loan, if need be.”

“That is excellent news, my son. It will make both of your lives so much easier and you can avoid long waits for public transportation.”

“My mother even offered to make the down payment for me,” Jamil added.

The woman didn’t comment further about the car, but changed the subject. “I want to ask you a question, but I am reluctant to do so,” she said, her dimples dancing in her face.

“Please do. I am very happy to answer any question you might ask and promise to be very frank with you.”

“Do you think your family will approve of you marrying outside the Dahshan family?”

Jamil was very surprised and dismayed. “What makes you ask that?”

“Because one of Uncle *Abu* Hanna’s friends informed him that your brother and his wife were hoping you would marry one of the family’s daughters--maybe the sister of your brother’s wife.”

Jamil laughed and said, “I heard something like that. Don’t worry. I already told my mother and my sisters about Grace. They were very happy and are waiting impatiently to welcome her into the family. They will be very happy to know you accepted me as her suitor.”

“I am glad to hear that,” she said. “Anyhow, marriage is predestined by the glorious God.”

“When do you want us to get married?”

“After Grace’s graduation in June. At that time, the mourning period will be ended.”

“Aren’t we going to have any kind of celebration?” Jamil asked.

“Of course we will. In June, the people renting the ground floor in this building gave notice that they will be moving out. We will use this opportunity to throw a small dinner party to accommodate about one hundred people. I will invite *Abu* Hanna’s family and a few other close friends, maybe about fifty people total.”

“How many people can I invite?”

“As many as you like. I know you have a very large family.”

“In this case, I will invite only the same number as you. According to our customs, when one gets married, he has to invite most, if not all, the members of his

family, friends and neighbors. There will be several hundred. I will do that when we return from the honeymoon.”

“Why do you have to do that?” she asked.

“If I don’t, I will be accused of being stingy and cheap and not worthy of being a member of the Dahshan family.”

The woman smiled but said nothing.

“I will be on summer vacation from teaching, so we can go on our honeymoon,” said Jamil.

“In order to see Grace outside our house, son, and in order to be able to take her anywhere, the marriage contract should be written.”

“Of course, of course! When do you want us to do that?”

“On Thursday, two weeks from now.”

“It will be done as you will. How many dignitaries do you want me to bring?” Jamil asked. “You know we have a very large family and a great number of friends and acquaintances. I am sure they all will be happy to attend the engagement ceremony.”

The woman gazed at her daughter’s suitor without saying a single word. Unsure what her silence meant, he continued. “Is five hundred enough? We could invite six, seven, eight hundred, even one thousand, if you wish.”

“Oh, my God! Why would you do that?” The woman asked, with laughter in her eyes.

“*Al-Jahah?*” Jamil exclaimed. “Don’t you want us to invite the dignitaries of the city to ask for your daughter’s hand? You know the greater the number of dignified people, the more respect we are showing for Grace and for you.”

“Yes, I know, but I’m sorry, son; we don’t believe in that custom,” the mother said. “Just you and your brother from your side will be sufficient. Uncle *Abu* Hanna and another friend from our side will attend. They will be witnesses to the marriage contract.”

“As you wish, Mother, as you wish.”

“We have no relatives in this country,” she said. “Grace’s only uncle married to my sister is living in Syria. My four sisters with their families also live there. All of them in addition to my daughter from Italy will be attending the marriage ceremony.”

“I’m looking forward to meeting them.”

Greatly pleased with the way the meeting had ended, Professor Jamil Dahshan rose to take his leave. Again he performed the traditional show of respect by taking Grace's mother's right hand in his own, gently kissing the back of her hand and raising it to his forehead, then repeating the gesture a second time.

"Thank you! Thank you, my son. The family is so happy to have you as a son-in-law," she said. "Also thank you very much for the beautiful box of chocolates. It was very thoughtful of you. You should not have bothered.

"It is a pleasure, Mother, to bring you small gifts. I hope to do so for many, many years to come," Jamil replied. "Please say good night to your children for me." With that he left the house with a smile on his face. This time he knew he would be returning to it again and again on many happy occasions over the years to come.

Chapter 26

After a long debate between Jamil, his bride and the members of the two families, the couple decided to spend their month long honeymoon in Egypt. There the bride would see the most famous antiquities, and Jamil could recapture memories from his days there as a student.

"I want this honeymoon to be so memorable that you will still feel its aromatic happiness when you are watching your grandchildren growing," Jamil told his bride.

In Cairo Jamil showed her the university from which he had graduated and introduced her to some of his former professors and friends as well as the Coptic woman, *umm* mother of Aymen, from whom he rented a room throughout his years of study. She was so happy that she insisted on throwing a dinner party for the newly married couple and for Jamil's friends. She even offered Jamil his old room for their

honeymoon since it was vacant due to the university's summer vacation. They thanked her and told her that they had a room overlooking the Nile River.

"Not a student but a friend lived in my house," *Umm Aymen* said to Jamil's bride after the two women exchanged profuse greetings. "Your husband was very generous. He never returned from his vacation to Jordon without bringing gifts to me and to my son's wife and to her daughter. He is very gentle, polite and understanding. He is very responsible and committed."

"Thank you, *Khalti Sumayya!*" Jamil burst out laughing and said, "I also brought you a gift this time. I knew I was going to see you." Saying that, he handed her a piece of silk woven in Damascus to be made into a dress for her and her daughter-in-law.

"But you have forgotten my granddaughter," *Umm Ayman* said with a chuckle.

"No, he did not," Mrs. Dahshan said. "He told me to buy her a pair of earrings. She must be a young lady now." She opened her purse and handed the woman a small box. Once again the woman praised the husband and thanked the bride.

The bridegroom showed his bride all the interesting places in Cairo: The old section of the city; the honorable Al Azhar Mosque and University; many ancient mosques including the famous Alabaster Mosque; libraries containing hundreds of thousands of very rare books; the famous Egyptian Museum and many other museums; Khan el-Khalili Bazaar; the Egyptian Castle; the American University; the famous Giza Zoo. He also took her to the three great pyramids at Giza; the statue of Ramses; the necropolis of Sakkara, the Pharaonic village; and Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt. They enjoyed magical experiences at several sound and light shows, took the Nile River dinner cruise and watched belly dancing and folklore shows.

After they had seen all the interesting places in Cairo, they moved to Alexandria, the Egyptian summer capital, where they rented a suite on the Mediterranean. They saw Alexandria's famous library which was burned and then rebuilt, the Roman remains of the Kom ash-Shuqqafa Catacombs and Caracalla Hall, Pompey's Pillar, and the Roman Amphitheater. The days at Alexandria were not packed with activities and excitement as were the days in Cairo because there were fewer places to see and they were tired. They spent much of their time swimming and enjoying sunbaths on the shore. Then they flew to Luxor.

In spite of the fact that Jamil had seen Luxor before, he felt as if he were seeing it for the first time. Years before, he had visited Luxor with some of the Jordanian students from the University. He was, in those days, short of time and shorter of money. This time he had plenty of time and a comfortable amount of money. No doubt the number of tourists had trebled or even quadrupled, and the services were far better. Also the expenses had increased tremendously.

They saw every place that was to be seen. They saw Karnuk and Luxor, the two most impressive temples in Upper Egypt. They also attended the Karnuk Sound and Light show. They went on a tour to the Luxor West Bank Valley of the Kings and the Hatshepsut Temple. They also took a hot air balloon flight over the Nile River's West Bank. They travelled from Luxor to Dendara by boat along the Nile River and saw the well-preserved Temples of Hathor, the Temple of Isis and the Coptic Basilica. They enjoyed seeing the tomb of Tutankhamun.

From Luxor to Aswan, the gateway to *Abu Simbel*, their final destination, they decided to take the bus because they liked to see the open countryside. In Aswan their reservation was in the legendary and fascinating Cataract Hotel, which did not merely witness history, but was itself history and is located on the elevated granite platform overlooking Elephantine Island. From its terrace they could see the Nile at sunset.

Indeed, the hotel is marvelous. It has very high ceilings, large and small apartment rooms, long corridors, a library, salons, art galleries and exhibitions, fireplaces in the halls, billiard rooms, elegant dining halls, restaurants and bars, dancing halls, orchestras and classical music concerts. It boasts a golf course and a spectacular garden adorned with trees from all parts of the world. Donkeys are waiting to take guests to the Philae Temple and the unfinished Obelisk, or to carry them to desert picnics.

On an air tour at night, the couple took the quick route and saw the magnificent temple of *Abu Simbel* and the Philae Temple and attended the Sound and Light Show. They also saw Aswan High Dam and the unfinished Obelisk. They crossed the Nile on a journey where they were introduced to the ancient sights of Upper Egypt. They sailed on the felucca to an extraordinarily beautiful Botanical Garden where they enjoyed peace and tranquility. They took a camel ride to the southern tip of Elephantine Island, to see St. Simeon's Monastery, an ancient abandoned fortress. They also saw Kalabsha Temple on the bank of Lake Nasser.

It was the last night for the honeymooners in Egypt. The next morning they would board the plane to Cairo where they would connect with the Royal Jordanian Airline in the afternoon and return to Amman. It had been their habit since coming to Aswan to eat supper at the hotel restaurant and then to sit in one of the lobbies, order two cups of Turkish coffee and visit while watching the surrounding activities and nursing their coffee. Since the beginning of their honeymoon, they had participated almost every night in some kind of activity. But in this hotel, they were happy to sit and relax after a long day of touring. Jamil was sitting in the middle of a large sofa which could accommodate four people. His wife was sitting to his right. The other half of the sofa was empty.

“To tell you the truth, Sweetheart,” said the bride after they had sat down, “in spite of the fact we have been having a great time, I miss my family very, very much, especially my youngest brother.”

“Believe me,” said Jamil. “I feel the same. *Inshallah*, if God is willing, tomorrow night we will be with them. Very soon, Sweetheart, you will have children of your own.”

“*Inshallah*,” said the wife happily, and added, “How many children do you want us to have?”

“I am a Middle Eastern husband, and would like to have a large family--six children at least--three boys and three girls.”

“I pray to Allah to fulfill your wish.”

“I also,” said Jamil.

“What would you like to drink?” the waiter interrupted their conversation.

He had just taken their order and departed when they noticed a man and a woman standing not far from them and looking at the vacant part of the sofa. Jamil noticed that the woman said something to her companion accompanied with a move of her head towards Jamil and his wife. Jamil noticed that the man nodded several times apparently accepting what she had told him. The man looked to be in his early thirties, and was supporting his left shoulder on a crutch and resting his other hand on his companion’s shoulder. The woman looked a little older than the man, had a pale face and an emaciated body and wore very thick glasses. It appeared that she was

carrying on her shoulders a heavy weight of grief and sorrows and had gone through much hardship and suffering. She helped her companion sit next to Jamil, took his crutches, leaned them against the wall behind them and sat next to him on the other side of the sofa.

Jamil did not know why he suddenly felt awfully sad and depressed when he saw those two human beings. He thought seriously of changing their seating, but he was not sure that he would find a comfortable place like this one or even if he would be able to find another place at all.

“What would you like to drink, please?” The waiter bowed respectfully, asking the couple.

“Two cups of cappuccino and some biscotti, please,” said the woman.

Jamil felt the voice of his neighbor was melancholy and sorrowful, yet charming, inspiring, and melodious, as if it were the singing of a nightingale. Her voice had the gloom and despondency of wretchedness, and yet it was a voice which inflamed the emotions and inspired the soul to want to dance in the open air. It tickled Jamil’s emotions, provoked his senses and granted him tremendous feelings of joy and happiness.

“I feel so happy I could fly,” said the man with the crutches after the waiter had left. “I am proud of myself, really proud. I did not think I had the strength to see all those antiquities.” Jamil noticed that his neighbor’s face lit up when he was talking, and a smile as sweet as that of a little baby covered his face.

“I told you, dear, that your health is good and you wouldn’t have any difficulties,” said the woman. “I am very sure tomorrow you do even better, much better. Trust me.”

“It is because of your love and your encouragement,” said the man. “I feel as if I were born anew.” Then he passed his left hand over her right one with a smile and a look of gratitude. The woman granted him a lovely but melancholy smile. Then she looked in Jamil’s direction and studied him for awhile as if she were trying to remember whether she had seen him before.

Suddenly the extremity of Jamil’s body was struck by convulsions, and a cold shiver crept through every cell of his body provoking all kinds of emotions. The voice of his neighbor was very familiar to his ears. It seemed to him he had heard it over and over for a long time. He contemplated, trying his best to remember when and

where he had heard it, but he could not. Perhaps he had heard the voice many times over the radio, but had never seen her face. She appeared to be a total stranger.

“Did you notice, Darling,” the man said, “that there are more tourists in this hotel from the United Kingdom than from any other part of the world?”

“It is a splendid hotel. That’s why I chose it,” the woman said. “I wish that Mother would have agreed to come with us. Then it would be a lovely vacation. I already miss her. I am worried about her.”

“Next year we will bring her and come if you like,” the man said. “I would love to come here again. I like the country very much. I have enough money in the bank.” After pausing for a moment he said, “Haven’t you asked Elizabeth to look after her?”

“Yes. She will go to see her once a day and telephone her, but she needs someone to stay with her all the time. She does not feel comfortable to spend the night alone, especially after Father’s death.”

“Her telephoning you every evening will make both of you feel more at ease,” the man said. “When did the hotel clerk tell you to expect the call?”

“They said it would be between nine and ten p.m.,” the woman said, looking at her wristwatch. “It is now nine forty-six. It should be coming very soon.”

All this time Jamil’s ears were tuned to the tongues of his two neighbors, and he was shaking from head to foot. He felt as if his heart were trying to escape from between his ribs. Then he heard the hotel clerk calling from over the microphone, “Miss Amanda Hamilton, your telephone call from London. Please go to booth number four.”

The woman trotted toward the location of the booth. After a few minutes Jamil unconsciously bolted out after the woman without excusing himself.

It seemed to him that she was not surprised to find him waiting outside the door of the booth, because she did not look startled or surprised. She only gave him a look of contempt and indignation, or so he thought at the beginning. But later he discovered he had been wrong.

“May I help you, Professor Dahshan?”

“I came to see you,” he said with a guilty and forlorn tone.

“Now you have seen me. Is there anything I could do for you?”

“I want to apologize to you,” Jamil said forcing a faint smile. “I would like to ask for your forgiveness. It seems to me that I have caused you great damage and much harm.”

“God is the one to ask, not me,” she said with a meek, humble voice.

Jamil had the distinct suspicion that she wanted to continue talking to him because her attitude and conversation were polite and respectful.

“I have been asking His forgiveness for years. Now I am asking yours, too,” Jamil said with a grieved tone in his voice.

“I harbor no vindictive feelings against you because I loved you with all my being,” she said. With the back of her left hand, she dried some tears that fell on her cheek. Then she continued. “The days I spent with you were the happiest ones of my life. I live now on their reminiscence. I will never forget them.”

Jamil felt that there was some kind of amity and affection in her speech, so he said, “If you harbor vindictive feelings towards me and hate and despise me, I wish that you would diminish God’s wrath on me, and make my conscience less reprimanding.” He waited for her to say something, but when she didn’t, he added, “I did not deserve your love, nor am I worthy of your trust. I am a villain . . . vagabond . . . scoundrel . . . I wish you had not believed me and trusted me.”

“When we fall in love and give all that we possess . . . body . . . heart . . . soul . . . emotions . . . everything . . . we don’t worry nor concern ourselves as to whether the person we love is a vagabond or a king,” Amanda said.

Jamil felt little and vile as he compared himself with this woman and her beliefs and sacrifices. He asked, “Is the man with you your husband?”

“No. He is a friend. That is Paul. I have told you a great deal about him. I am now taking care of him.”

“Oh, yes, yes. What has happened to him? I mean why is he using the crutches?”

“It seemed that some of the political opposition in your part of the world did not like their government accepting military aid from the United Kingdom or any other European countries,” she said. “They shot Paul and his assistant. He was lucky to escape with his life, but his assistant died.”

“I am very sorry to hear that!” Jamil felt he was about to vomit.

“It disabled him and left him impotent.”

“Alas! How dreadful and cruel!” Jamil exclaimed sincerely. “Both of you, you and Paul, were destined to meet and deal with only wicked and ruthless people.”

“When we came to the lounge and saw the empty place next to you, I did not recognize you until after we had sat down. I thought to go somewhere else, but I did not want Paul to wonder. I forgot that we could recognize people we know from their voices,” she said. “Anyhow, you did not change much. You are still handsome and full of life!”

“What has happened to you? I did not recognize you physically,” Jamil said. “If it had not been for your voice, it would have been impossible for me to recognize you. You have changed a great deal, a very great deal. I cannot believe my eyes. I am shocked . . . dismayed . . . puzzled,” Jamil found himself asking without being able to stop himself!

“When I went home, my parents and I arranged everything for my wedding. I mean for our wedding, but we learned that you had returned to America without leaving me word. I had a nervous breakdown and entered the hospital. I stayed there five weeks. I almost lost my vision and was about to die.”

She moistened her lips with her tongue once and added, “I had an abortion. Then I had diabetes. My father died of grief. Then Paul returned from overseas almost paralyzed.”

After drying her tears, she added, “It was not a pleasant year for us. Thank God I am still living, so I could help poor Paul.”

Tears of deep grief and painful sorrows flooded Jamil’s eyes and he said, “It seems to me I have destroyed your life and that of your family, too. I don’t know how I am going to live with my conscience and meet God on the judgment day.”

“I will pray for you and ask God’s forgiveness,” she said meekly. “He always forgives sinners.”

“You always think honorably and act elegantly even with the people who have done you wrong,” Jamil said.

The young lady did not reply to Jamil’s compliment but said, “Zaynon was there from the first day. He helped financially, physically, spiritually and sympathetically. He visited us very often and telephoned us almost daily. Before we left home to come on here, he came and wished us, Paul and me, a happy trip.” A braid of hair fell and covered her left eye. Returning it to its place she added, “Zaynon is gallant, faithful and trustworthy.”

Jamil felt as if the woman were sending him a bullet with every single word she said.

“I am a villain and a deceiver,” he acknowledged

Again the woman did not comment, so he asked, “How is Zaynon? What did he think of me? I mean, what did he say about me?”

“He also harbors no vindictive feelings against you. He thought you two chaps were victims of your rigid upbringing and your merciless society.”

“Tell him I miss him terribly.” Jamil tried to conceal his tears by not looking at her and added, “Tell him I have spent nights and nights wailing and ailing, crying like a little baby who lost his mother for what I did to you and him.”

“Do you know that one of his legs was amputated?”

“What? Oh my God! That is awful!” Jamil cried aloud. “Why? When?”

“It was a year ago,” she said. He developed a severe case of diabetes due to anger and frustration according to his doctor.”

“How does he walk?”

“He has an artificial leg.”

“Oh my God! Poor Zaynon!” Jamil said, “I never thought your destruction would be on my hands.”

“Here you are!” Jamil’s wife said. “I worried when you were gone so long.”

Jamil startled and a wave of sweat flooded his body. With a trembling voice he said in Arabic, “*Ahlann habeebati*, Hello, Sweetheart,” Then he shifted into English. “Let me introduce you to a lovely lady.”

He put his right hand around his wife’s shoulder and advanced her a little toward Amanda. “Grace, may I introduce you to Miss Amanda Hamilton. She is from the United Kingdom, and we met at an international conference in Oxford several years back.”

Then he looked at Amanda and said, “Miss Hamilton, may I introduce you to Grace Dahshan, my wife. We are leaving for Jordon tomorrow morning.” The two women shook hands and engaged themselves in conversation. Jamil did not hear one single word because he was struggling with a guilty conscience in an ocean of grief.

“I must be going,” Amanda said. “Paul must be concerned now. Nice meeting you, Mrs. Dahshan. Your husband was the center of the conference for his

bright, daring ideas and his moral courage in spite of his young age,” she said while her hand was embracing Grace’s.

“And you were the rose of the conference and of his throbbing heart,” Jamil found his tongue saying, his ashamed eyes avoiding looking at her face, while his shaking hand still held hers.

“That woman must have been hurt and suffered severely,” Mrs. Dahshan said to her husband after Miss Hamilton had gone. “What remains of her is only a ghost, a shadow of a woman.” She felt dispirited and was about to cry.

“You are right, Sweetheart. She was ungodly beautiful, charming, intelligent, active and full of love and life. She walked as though she were dancing and you could feel the ground under her feet undulating, exalting and singing, glorifying the Almighty with her amazing grace and distinguished beauty,” Jamil said.

“You must have been one of her admirers,” his wife said.

Jamil did not comment, but added, “She was with a man of her age, tall, handsome, charming, very bright, and like her, full of life and enthusiasm, and they were madly in love.”

Jamil paused a moment and added, “She told me a few minutes ago her tragic story. The fellow she was with asked her to marry him, and she agreed. Then he told her to go to London where she had been living with her parents and to prepare to get married. He told her that he would join her the following week. But instead of that, he disappeared and even left the United Kingdom since he was not from there.” Jamil paused again for a moment to catch his breath, and added, “Not only that, but he left a baby in her womb.”

“He must have been a beast with no heart,” his wife said. “Wasn’t he afraid that he would provoke the Almighty to would pour out the vials of His wrath upon his sisters and his female kin and make them meet the same destiny! I wonder how he could live with his conscience if he had one. The Almighty should wreak vengeance upon him.”

“I agree with you, Sweetheart. He must have been a beast with no feelings, no compassion and a dead conscience. Please let us go to our room. I am so sad and depressed I am about to faint. I am afraid I am going to vomit,” Jamil said and burst out crying hysterically.

In the turmoil of his emotions, Professor Jamil Dahshan suddenly remembered Fairuz, the nightingale of the Arabs. His mind began forming a haunting verse with

words that inflamed his passion and fanned hidden emotions which smoldered in the deepest parts of his heart. He pictured her poised at the tip of a towering minaret on a huge mosque in Beirut, Lebanon, the Switzerland of the Arabs, the country of beauty, charm, elegance and romance, the torch of intellectualism and enlightenment, the homeland of Jubran Khalil Jobran, Macheal Noimeh and Saeed Aqil. She was calling to Zaynon with all the volume her precious lungs could produce.

Z-a-y-n-o-- n! Z-a-y-n-o--n!

Tell the sun to cease from setting. . . to freeze,
And order the earth to surrender its loyal orbit;
Silence the seas and oceans from roaring,
And stop the mountains and the meadows from shaking!
Tell them to bow and kneel in worship and in adoration,
Lamenting the grievances and the sorrows
Of Miss Amanda Hamilton's tragedy!

Professor Dahshan was shaking severely from head to foot, and his tears were falling like heavy rain. When his wife led him to their suite, she became extremely frightened and worried that her husband would never make it home, and she would be a widow after her honeymoon.

From that night forward, Professor Jamil Dahshan suffered nightmares in which he would see Miss Amanda Hamilton sitting on an armchair wearing a white bridal dress, her hair arranged over her head in the shape of a queen's crown, her open hands on her lap. She is gazing into her palms as if reading her fortune, tears falling in profusion like hailstones. Jamil is sitting respectfully on the floor in front of her, cross-legged, imploring her to talk to him and to grant him her forgiveness, but she continues crying and will not speak to him nor even raise her eyes to meet his so he can join her in her grief and her weeping.

As the dream continues, a door suddenly opens. A tall, husky, elephant-sized man with a thick black beard and red eyes emitting sparks bursts through the door. His hands are as big as a trunk of a tree. He is wearing an old, long black hat and ragged clothes. He walks like a robot full of contempt and revenge. The giant rushes towards Jamil and grabs his mouth, wanting to smother him. The trembling young man in the prime of his youth tries with all his strength to push away the iron hand from his mouth but he can not. The two wrestle fiercely.

When he cannot push away the man's hand, Jamil shrieks for help, yelling "*Yammah!* Mother!" Then Jamil awakens, throws off the covers and jumps out of bed, frightened and trembling, shaking from head to foot, every part of his body drowning with a sticky sweat.

Jamil continued having this dreadful nightmare every single night for a long time, making his life very unpleasant and worrying his wife. When Grace told Jamil's mother, Aminah, about the dreadful and horrifying nightmares her husband was suffering, her first thought was of her son's tragic love affair with the *Jinniah* when he was a young lad. She believed that a wicked woman had occupied the young lad's body, controlling his behavior physically and spiritually, and wanting to marry him without his consent.

"She has done it again! Oh, my God! What shall I do?" the mother asked herself. "Were it not that a pious and righteous *Imam* wrote the *Hijab* amulet and uttered a charm over my beloved son when he was afflicted with the *Jinniah* years ago, he would not be living now."

She considered getting on the bus and heading to her old town of Salt where that good *Imam* had lived. Then she remembered that her son Karim had told her a year earlier that he had read in the obituary section of the newspaper that *Imam* Mansour Baddawi- may God grant him His mercy and grace by including his name with the righteous people who are predestined to enter His immortal paradise to indulge themselves in peace and tranquility- had passed away.

Aminah was scared and perplexed to know what to do since she didn't know of any *Imam*, let alone one capable of purifying her son. When the worried mother revealed her secret to her neighbor, *Umm* Khalid-maha, the neighbor encouraged her to put her heart at ease and to have faith in the Almighty. She said, "The *Imam* of the mosque where my husband performs his daily prayers is our relative and capable of performing this kind of purification. Besides, he is very discreet and keeps his mouth shut about these critical and confidential deeds, not even telling his wife."

"I disagree with you, *Umm* Karim, that the nightmares are caused by the *Janniah* woman. Not this time," the neighbor said, shaking her head several times. "I believe they are caused by one of the women from the Dahshan family who was expecting that your son would be a suitor to her daughter and was disappointed when she saw him not marrying her daughter but a strange woman who is not from the Dahshan family."

“Do you think so?” Aminah asked.

“I strongly believe so,” she said. “That mother, in order to get her revenge, probably gave a good amount of money to one of those no good evil magicians and asked him to bewitch your son in order to make you and him miserable.”

“God forgive her, whoever she is. Isn’t she afraid of what might happen to her son or daughter?” Aminah asked. “Anyhow, please ask *Abu Khalid* to tell the *Imam* to be sure not to say anything to anybody. Both of them are to keep it confidential. I do not want people to say Aminah Dahshan’s son is insane.”

The neighbor assured her of complete confidentiality and added, “I know our people believe that if one has any kind of emotional problem, he is sick and should be put in an insane asylum.”

Those horrible nightmares began fading away when Professor Jamil Dahshan started writing Miss Amanda Hamilton’s tragic story and getting it out of his inner being by confessing to her in the presence of his conscience first and in front of God second that he had cheated and betrayed that innocent, pure, good-hearted soul, and that he was the cause of her father’s death and of her destruction! They ceased completely when he finished the first draft of the tragedy of this poor, tormented and miserable woman.

Professor Jamil Dahshan kept his faithful and honest promise to his mother-in-law. He never loved any woman other than his wife, nor did he ever cheat on her or even entertain the idea of doing so. He was a loyal husband and a devoted father who worked diligently to maintain a high standard of living for his family.

More than five years had passed by since Professor Jamil Dahshan had undergone any of these dreadful and horrifying nightmares! As a matter of fact, all of his dreams, whether daydreams or night dreams, were happy and rosy and he forgot that he had ever been tormented by nightmares!

After selling the very valuable and only piece of land he had inherited from his deceased father, taking a loan from the bank to be paid monthly from his salary, and with the help of his mother in law, Professor Dahshan was able to buy a very large and beautiful house furnished with luxurious furniture, surrounded by a large and beautiful garden full of roses and flowers in the most exclusive part of the capital, Amman.

Every day after returning from the university after delivering his lectures, Professor Dahshan would take a shower and don his tailor made silken pajamas, topped by an expensive and fancy morning robe-de-chambre, following the custom of the distinguished and highly learned people in that area! His usual schedule allowed him to enjoy a late lunch with his wife and their two beautiful children, a girl Hazar and a boy Firas. Afterwards he would take about an hour's nap, and drink some Turkish coffee with his pregnant wife while the Filipino maid took care of the two children.

Sometimes before and sometimes just after sunset, depending upon the season of the year, Jamil's relatives would arrive to spend part of the evening with their beloved son, the distinguished professor, who brought to their family fame, recognition, and respect among the one thousand family members and the rest of the community. Their generous, good-hearted and beloved son, Professor Jamil and his hospitable and welcoming wife never allowed a guest to leave at the end of the evening without loading him with some kind of food or dessert!

Almost daily Professor Dahshan's mother, his mother-in-law with some of her children, his brother Kareem, his wife and their children, his sisters, their husbands and children, and his spinster aunt spent the evening at his house! Most nights they ate dinner or enjoyed snacks. On the rare occasions when they did not, they still did not leave empty handed, carrying with them either some food or dessert! The family was together every evening unless professor Dahshan had an evening meeting or other social engagement.

It was Christmas evening. Professor Jamil Dahshan, his wife, and some colleagues with their spouses had been invited for the sixth consecutive year to an early Christmas dinner at the house of his colleague professor Dalal Zaidan, who had introduced his wife Grace to him several years earlier when Grace and Professor Dalal Zaidan's daughter Samirah were students at the university. Because of this invitation, it was possible that none of Professor Dahshan's relatives or any of their friends expected to come to their house that evening.

It was around 8 o'clock when they left their host's house. Professor Dahshan stopped the car in the drive way and before opening the door he said to his wife, "I don't know, Sweetheart, why I suddenly feel depressed and down hearted! I feel I am smothering and about to suffocate!"

"I am sorry, *Habibi*, that you feel that way! We had a wonderful time. Every colleague of yours teased you and said how much you are admired by your students--specially the girls!" Smiling, she added; "As a matter of fact, I enjoyed myself so much that I think we should invite the same group very soon, especially since *Eid Al-Hajj* is coming very soon!"

"I hope you did not get jealous, *Habibati*!" Jamil said.

"Not at all! I know how much you love me and how faithful you are to me!" his wife replied.

"Thank you, *Habibati*, for this trust! I would never ever find a woman as beautiful, compassionate, loving, understanding, faithful and generous as you if I were to tour the world!" he said. His wife smiled and said nothing in reply.

"What do you think of paying a visit to my mother's house or your mother's?" Jamil asked. "It might make me feel better!"

"I think it is a good idea!" After looking at her hand watch she added, "It is still early. Let us go inside first to be sure that the children are sleeping and also to open my mother's birthday gift to you, so we can thank her for it and tell her how much you appreciate it!"

"Oh my God! Thank you darling for reminding me!" Jamil said. "I had forgotten all about it! If she knows I have not opened it after all this time, she might think I don't love her, nor care for her gift." Having said that, Jamil opened the car door, closed it behind him, walked around the car, and opened the passenger's door

for his wife to get out, bending the upper part of his body, and opening his right hand welcomingly while holding the car door with his left hand.

His wife thanked him, granted him a lovely smile and said, "You always treat me like as if we just have gotten married!"

"I will always do so!" Opening the car door for you gives me a great pleasure!"

Before Professor Dahshan bought his car, when he and his wife used to take a taxi, he always opened the car door for Grace. He did this both when they were engaged and after they get married. This practice made his wife happy and very proud of her husband. Many times she had the chance to open the car's door and get out of it, but she would not do it and always waited for him to open it for her!

Doing this in front of the house raised the jealousy of some neighbors' wives whose husbands never opened the car's door for them. The Arab male, in general, looks at a woman as his inferior. So he considers opening the car's door for his female as against his manhood, his masculinity, his dignity; his honor! To his understanding, it shows weakness! And he thinks the woman will not respect nor revere him. But to Professor Dahshan, opening the car's door for his wife expressed civilized and cultured elegance.

When the couple entered the house they found the children were sleeping and the Filipino maid was ironing their school uniforms and some other clothes! She told them that no one had come nor telephoned since they had left, except the delivery man who had brought the usual weekly supply of juice, milk and diapers for the children.

Suddenly professor Dahshan felt in no mood to go out again and preferred to stay home for the rest of the evening; so he changed into his evening clothes. When his wife saw what he had done, she changed into her silken nightgown.

Both husband and wife entered their bed room and sat together on a love seat sofa. Grace handed her husband the birthday gift her mother had sent him. Upon opening the package, he discovered a book written by the poet of the Palestinian Revolution, Mahmoud Darwish.

Grace possessed a very melodious voice, loaded with charm and compassion, especially when she recited poetry! It was as beautiful as that of a nightingale, so her husband often asked her to read poetry for him! She herself was a great lover of

poetry and knew a great deal of it by heart. Sometimes she even composed it. Both husband and wife were very thankful to God that they shared this interest.

Professor Dahshan was delighted with such a precious and distinguished gift. Picking up the telephone, he called and warmly thanked his mother-in-law for making such an intelligent choice. After both he and Grace had chatted a few minutes with her, they hung up the telephone. Then Jamil asked Grace to read some of the poems.

Less than fifteen minutes later, the bedroom door flew open with no forewarning knock. The Filipino maid stood trembling at the door with wild eyes, fright stamped on her pale face. Her body was trembling like a tender branch in the way of a strong wind as she attempted to get out the words. "Sir! Sir! Sir! A huge Ghost is standing at the outside door asking about you. He is wearing old, theatrical-like clothes and looks as though he has just come from the jungle! He has one leg and a crutch!

Professor Dahshan rushed to the main door and saw a tall man with long hair wearing thick eyeglasses and gazing at him.

"Of course you don't recognize me!" said the man in a loud and rough voice. "How could you remember me while you are living in this fancy home and enjoying this luxurious life!"

"Ooh, Zaynon!" Professor Dahshan exclaimed and advanced toward the man in order to shake his hand. "I am very sorry, but you have changed a great deal! If it were not for your voice, I would not recognize you! How have you been?"

Zaynon ignored Professor Dahshan's extended hand and said, "Since I returned from Oxford more than two weeks ago, I have been trying to locate you. My brother Zaid, who works with your nephew Mohammad as a driver for the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, told me about your luxurious life and your position as a distinguished professor."

"But he did not tell me about you!" Professor Dahshan said, walking toward Zaynon once again with extended hand. But Zaynon ignored it for the second time. "I told him not to tell you because I wanted it to be a surprise! I am aware of the fact that he knows how close friends we were!"

"Indeed this is a surprise!" Professor Dahshan said and spread a big, happy smile over his face. He drew closer to the man to hug him, but to his surprise and disappointment his friend pushed him away from him!

"Sweetheart, why don't you ask your friend to come into the house to talk instead of standing at the door step?" said Grace who had rushed after her husband and listened to the conversation from the beginning!

"You must be his wife! Indeed you are very beautiful! I was told that Jamil got married to one of his rich students who helped him to establish himself!" Zaynon said.

"Is it wrong, Sir, for a wife to help her husband financially if her parents are well to do?" Grace asked.

"Not at all, dear, if the husband is decent and deserves to be helped," replied Zaynon."

"Do you mean my husband is not!" exclaimed the wife, her eyes wide open with shock.

Your husband is a villainous, contemptible, base coward who cannot be trusted with women!" was Zaynon's stunning reply.

Grace was certainly puzzled and perplexed. She did not utter a single word, but stared hard at the ghostly man standing at the door! He continued, "Your husband is no good! He is a cheat, a liar. He is conniving and deceitful and has every bad habit found in this world!"

"Oh my God! My God! What makes you say so, sir?" asked the terrified wife!

"He destroyed the lives of four innocent people by stealing the heart of a pure, innocent, faithful girl from her fiancée! He wrecked her life and her fiancée's life too. The grief that followed caused the death of her parents!"

"But she forgave me when I met her last time in Egypt! I swear to you she did!" Professor Dahshan declared vehemently, his anger stirred.

"Yes, she told me that!" Zaynon said. "But her parents, her fiancée, and the All Mighty did not! Remember and don't forget that the Almighty God is watching you as a guardian on a watch tower! I came tonight to tell you that His revenge is coming soon... very soon. Do not think that He has forgiven you!" Zaynon said.

"OK! OK!" Jamil said; "Now *tafaddal!* Come inside let us talk! I want to ask you about yourself and also about them."

"You want to know about your victims and how much you hurt them so you satisfy your sick ego! I lost my leg because of severe diabetes due to great sadness and stress because of your dreadful behavior; the father and the mother died of grief about their daughter and her fiancée; and Amanda and Paul are living a miserable life! Her vision is almost gone; she is semi-blind. Paul is barely able to use the crutches!"

"Oh, my God! My God! How awful is that!" Professor Dahshan said.

"Jamil told me you were very close friends!" said the wife. "Please, sir, come inside and let us serve you something!"

"Yes, we were very close friends but we are friends no more!" said Zaynon. "I would not enter your house because it is the home of a criminal; nor I will eat your food because it is filthy, contaminated, impure, defiled!" With that, Zaynon slammed the door in their faces and left.

Professor Dahshan opened the door in a great hurry and ran after his friend, trying to stop him from leaving, but Zaynon pushed him so hard that he fell on the ground. By the time he had scrambled to his feet, Zaynon had slammed the outside gate behind him and left.

"Wait! Wait! Please wait Zaynon! Let me drive you home, or let me hail a cab for you. You cannot walk home. It is too far!" Jamil yelled, but Zaynon did not even turn his head.

Professor Dahshan rushed back home, got the car keys, and without changing from his night clothes, he slid into his car and chased his friend.

"Wait Jamil! Let me come with you, Sweetheart, please!" Professor Dahshan heard his wife calling him from in front of the house, but he would not listen!

"Darling! Please don't follow him! He took Eretria Street! Remember it is very narrow and a one way street! A driver might be in hurry and hit you!" She yelled at her husband who heard her but wouldn't listen.

When Professor Dahshan reached Saido al-Kordi Mosque and looked far away at the end of the street, where several streets meet, Zaynon was about to disappear down one of them. Knowing he would not be able to keep track of him much longer, Professor Dahshan stomped on the gas pedal in desperation, two wheels nearly leaving the ground as the little car responded to his sudden, violent action.

The young professor did not know what had happened next until afterward. When he awoke, he felt severe pain occupying every cell of his being, and saw all kinds of medical equipment embracing every part of his body!

"Oh my God! Where am I?" he asked in very weak, hollow voice.

"*Sehi... Sehi... Sehi...!* Al-Hamdulillah! He regained consciousness, thanks be to God," Jamil heard his wife, his mother, his spinster aunt and two of his sisters exclaim in unison! Jamil then burst out with passionate and hysterical crying and was soon joined by every woman present! Very soon a doctor and a nurse rushed into the

patient's room to congratulate Jamil for his recovery. They told him that he was very lucky to be alive, because his accident had been extremely serious. They told him that he should be able to leave the university hospital after one week and that he had been brought to the hospital by ambulance two nights earlier.

Later that day Mrs. Dahshan related to her husband what had happened to him Christmas evening. "The police report says that you were driving in a residential neighborhood on a very narrow, one-way street packed with cars on both sides. Your speed exceeded what would have been safe on an open highway! One of the residents who lives close to the main street does not like to drive several blocks and go to his house by the right entrance, so he made a short cut going the wrong way on the narrow street. You hit him." she said.

"The neighbors told the police that he is always breaking the law and going to his house the wrong way!" said Jamil's aunt.

"What happened to him?" Jamil asked.

"Nothing! Only a little blood and some scratches to his car! It was a very strong Buick!" said his mother and added, "but your car was totally demolished!"

Professor Dahshan left the hospital twenty days later, not after a week as the doctors had told him. He left without his right leg, but it was replaced by a wooden leg supported by a crutch-cane! The difference between Professor Dahshan and Zaynon was that Zaynon had lost his left leg while Professor Dahshan lost his right one!

Indeed! God is omnipotent! He is merciful... He is great... He is compassionate... but he is very revengeful... He respites, but doesn't neglect!

Praise and glory be to His name which is full of Majesty, Bounty and Honor; in Whose hands is the dominion of all things Who will judge all people in that great and final day. Amen

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author was born and reared in the ancient Jordanian city of Salt, where he graduated from the local high school. This school was once the highest institution of learning in the whole of Jordan and consisted only of male students. At that time, the government was the only employer in Jordan. Any young man who aspired to hold a prominent government position had to complete his secondary education at the school in Salt before going abroad to take advanced studies in one of the universities in a neighboring Arab country or in Europe. Prime ministers, judges, cabinet members, school teachers, chiefs of police and other high ranking government officials received their secondary education at this school. This was the case until the year of the Palestinian *Nakbah* calamity in 1948 which shook the Arab and Islamic worlds and awakened them from their rosy dreams and deep slumber.

The author lost his father when he was five years old. His mother, who was not yet thirty, was two and a half months pregnant with his little sister at the time. His father had owned multiple farms throughout the country where he grew field crops such as wheat, garbanzo beans, lentils, barley and corn and garden produce such as tomatoes, cucumbers, fuggoose, watermelons and cantaloupes. He also owned vineyards and olive groves. He also had raised cattle and other kinds of livestock. Each farm had its own staff and laborers. In addition to these responsibilities, he had been the *Mokhtar*, or local head, of his family tribe which numbered more than 1000 people.

When he was in his mid-twenties, the author left Jordan to study in America. Though his purpose was to further his education, he came on an immigrant visa because student visas at that time required financial backing and sponsorship. The only communication he was able to have with the people he had left behind was through letters which were delivered via sea mail or air mail. He was unable to speak to them by telephone for twelve years because of the lack of technology. Today it is possible to telephone his family and friends in Jordan a dozen times a day.

He received a BA in English Literature from California State University and his Masters in Middle Eastern languages and literatures from the University of California (UCLA).

Following his graduation, he taught the Arabic language and Islamic studies at UCLA and in community colleges located in Pasadena, Los Angeles, Covina and Hollywood.

After returning to his native Middle East, he taught English at the Teacher's Training College, United Nations, Jordan and then at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At the time of writing his two novels in English, *Beads of Memory* and *August Rain*, the author was a faculty member at the University of Jordan. The author is now a member of the California Writers Club.

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BY THE AUTHOR

IN ENGLISH

Beads of Memory (Trelogy)

August Rain (Novel)

IN ARABIC

1. *Fee Bilad Assamni Walassal*

In The Country of Milk and Honey (Novel)

2. *Teeh Professor Dahshan*

Professor Dahshan's Diaspora (Novel)

3. *Fabakat Wa Bakait*

She Wept and I Wept too (Novel)

4. *Kristina...! The Elicit love !*

(Novel!)