

ENCOUNTER
AT THE
HOSPITAL

Bint Al-Huda

xkp

Chapter 1

TRANSLATOR'S COMMENT

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

Amina Haidar Al-Sadr; known as Bint-al-Huda, tackled in her stories women's issues of concern, at a time when love stories and translated pornographic literature flooded our Islamic world during the 1950's and 60's. The young generation suffered major psychological crises and schizophrenic situations. Islamic values and ethics became a source of embarrassment for the educated youth who fell in the trap of western deviation and disbelief.

Bint-al-Huda considers story writing as a tool to be used to revive Islamic concepts and values. She turns these concepts into living personalities with real life roles. She presents various models of defeated young girls who are encouraged to fight back and regain their confidence and strength to start a new, respected life. She encourages the young girl who is pressured by social non-Islamic traditions to fight back for her rights.

Despite her short life (1937-1980), Bint-al-Huda managed to create an awareness among the Iraqi women to the extent that this awareness became a common feature in society, embodied in Islamic dress, hijab—observed by the educated girls in schools, universities, government offices, etc...

No doubt, the ruling Ba'ath Party in Iraq, a secular regime, wouldn't allow such a promising personality to live, threatening the regime's false claims of freedom, justice and progress. Hence, Bint-al-Huda and her

brother the great Muslim thinker, Ayatullah Sayid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, were arrested in early April 1980. A few

days later, on 9th April, 1980, after brutal torture they achieved blessed martyrdom.

The loss has never been compensated for since then. We lack Muslim women writers to counter so many secularist women writers in the Muslim world.

On the eleventh anniversary of her martyrdom, we present this book to our English readers. We hope every Muslim woman will follow in her footsteps and strive for the sake of our oppressed societies and oppressed women in particular.

Though deceased Bint-al-Huda will rejoice whenever a deviated soul finds the right path of the religion of Islam. Allah, the Almighty says, '*... And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead,. nay, they are alive...*' (Aale-Imran: 168)

M.N.Sultan
1991(1411 Hijri)

Early

Chapter 2

THE MEETING

Dr. Miyad was half asleep when the telephone rang. She struggled between sleep's powerful domination and her duty to answer the phone. It rang insistently until she finally answered it, as she knew she must. It was after mid night.

An urgent case on the hospital's seventh floor made her quickly put on her Islamic modest dress and soon she was hurrying towards the patient's room. A nurse near the door told her that an elderly woman in the room was seriously ill.

Dr. Miyad quickly entered and saw a young woman, modestly dressed, standing next to the old woman's bed. The young woman said anxiously, "Oh doctor, this is my grandmother. She was complaining of severe pain and she's unconscious."

The doctor carefully examined the elderly woman, who began to moan, and the young woman paced the nearby corridor. Her grandmother had had a serious heart attack and needed to be hospitalized for a number of days. After giving the patient the needed medicine, Dr. Miyad approached the young woman, whose eyes were filled with tears. The doctor felt that she had to comfort her and give her hope. She smiled, saying, "I'm sure she will soon be well I have done all that is necessary."

"I am very grateful, doctor."

"Don't thank me. It's my duty to help all my patients." She noticed that the woman's face was pale, so she took her hand, which was cold to the touch, and told her kindly, "You are tired. Why don't you sleep for a while?"

"Yes, I am tired, but I can't leave my grandmother alone."

"Don't you have a sister or anyone else to help you?"

"No," the young woman replied sadly. "She is not only my grandmother, but is a mother to me as well."

The doctor felt sorry for her and comforted her, saying, 'I'll look after her for you so that you can rest.'

"Oh no, you need rest. You work so hard."

"I'm used to it, and I don't feel tired. I've slept for a few hours and that is enough for me. Now it is your turn to rest, but first I'll get a book to read. I'll be right back."

The young woman thought the doctor was a wonderful woman and felt she could depend on her.

Dr. Miyad soon returned with a book in her hand and said, "Now you can sleep, I'll sit here and read. By the way, I'm Dr. Miyad."

"I'm Warqa, I'm pleased to meet you."

Warqa stretched out on the sofa and soon fell asleep. When she awoke she found that she had slept for over an hour. The doctor was still reading near the sick woman, who slept well with the help of an oxygen mask. Warqa got up and approached Dr. Miyad. She asked about her grandmother's health. The doctor put aside her book and said, "She's all right. Now I shall sleep for a while after doing my morning prayer. I'll see you later today, God willing."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Warqa. "You have been very kind and helpful. I am all alone."

"You're not alone; Almighty Allah is with you. You seem to be a committed believer, and faith can help you throughout life."

Warqa thanked the doctor again and walked with her to the door. When she came back into the room, she saw the book, which the doctor had just left, and the title attracted her attention. It was entitled, **Medicine: A Sanctuary for Faith**. She wondered, "What does it mean? What relation is there between the two? Isn't medicine a science which cures bodies or diseases, and religion worship of Allah in order to escape from Hell? How can medicine be a sanctuary of faith?"

Curiosity prompted her to pick up the book. First she examined the cover, which showed a drawing of a human brain and the Qur'anic verse:

This is Allah's creation, but show Me what those beside Him have created.

(Luqman:11)

Warqa read a few lines from the book and thought deeply for some time, and then she read more until she got up to perform her morning prayer.

A nurse entered the room in the morning to give Warqa's grandmother a dose of medicine. A specialist and another female doctor also came in later.

The doctor's hair was uncovered and her high heels clicked as she walked. She turned to give Warqa some instructions and Warqa noticed that her face was heavily made up. Warqa saw a big difference between this doctor and Dr. Miyad, whose appearance was natural, and she was eager to see Dr. Miyad again. She needed her encouraging words wanted to ask her a few questions about her book. She wondered why Dr. Miyad had not returned. Warqa's grandmother was feeling better, and Warqa was glad to see her getting well.

"I 'm so happy that you are well again," said Warqa. "You don't know how worried I was yesterday."

Her grandmother replied, "I'm sorry to see you worry; especially since you are alone."

"This time I wasn't alone. Dr. Miyad was here. She is a wonderful woman and she insisted that I sleep while she sat near you for over an hour."

"Praise be to God for sending you such a person at this time."

Warqa pleaded with her grandmother to sleep and not to talk or otherwise tire herself. She continued to read and she occasionally glanced at the door. At noon, she became quite anxious to see Dr. Miyad and thought to herself, 'Why am I so anxious to see her? I've known her for only a few hours. She is just a doctor performing her duty. Maybe she won't even come again.' Some inner voice told her: 'You have a right to feel this way. This doctor is filled with compassion and sympathy. She is not only a doctor, but is also a good person without whose help you would have suffered more hardships.'

Warqa was deep in thought when she heard a knock on the door. She hurried to the door. It was Dr. Miyad. They shook hands warmly, and the doctor said, "I heard from a colleague that your grandmother was better. I was busy all morning in the delivery room, so I must apologize for not coming sooner. "

"Oh, there's no need to apologize; you were not obliged to come. However, I did want to see you."

The doctor looked concerned and examined her patient. "Has she complained of any pain?" she asked.

"No, she is much better, thank God. As a matter of fact, I was in need of you. Won't you please sit down?"

"I will stay for a while. You look tired, you need to sleep," said Dr. Miyad.

"Oh, I don't need sleep, but, rather, a thorough waking up. I would like to ask you about some of the things I have read in this book," Warqa told her. She sat near the doctor, who said, "Oh, I see I have left my book here. You must have enjoyed reading it."

"Yes, it really made me think deeply."

"How?"

"Well", Warqa explained, "I never thought there was any relationship between medicine and faith. I know medicine deals with human bodies, while faith is only worship."

Dr. Miyad said, "But science leads to faith. The more knowledge one has, the more one believes in the Creator. "

"How is that so?" asked Warqa.

"If someone ignores something, he cannot appreciate its value. For instance, if you take a look at this electric heater, you don't think about the great effort and care it took its maker to make it. You won't think about the numerous experiments that preceded this final product. Yet, anyone with a little knowledge can talk about its complex technical design."

Warqa tried to suppress a smile. Dr. Miyad was silent for a moment and then said, "Are you a student?"

"Yes, I'm in my final year at the university." She did not mention what her major was. Dr. Miyad told her, "You're studying at the Engineering College, aren't you?"

Warqa was surprised, and said, "Yes, but how did you know?"

"Because of your small smile on hearing me mention the electric heater. I guessed that you are familiar with the subject. It wasn't a good example but you didn't object, out of courtesy."

"It is a good example," Warqa said. "Please go on."

"So you see, even a minimum of knowledge about something doubles its value. Science, with all its branches, brings scientists nearer to Almighty Allah. Medicine is the most important and accurate science. To

a scientist who is not a fanatic, science is a road which clearly leads to faith."

"My religious knowledge is very limited," said Warqa.

"It is only traditional commitment, such as fasting, praying and observing Islamic modest dress. Sometimes I feel embarrassed about my lack of religious information. Would you be kind enough to explain some matters to me?"

"I'm ready to answer all your questions. Consider me as your sister, since we share the same beliefs. Now, what do you want to ask me?"

"Why has a drawing of a brain been chosen for the cover of the book?"

"You know that the brain is the most important part of the human body. It is the organ, which controls the entire body, including the nerves and the cells. Every cell obeys the brain which, though small, contains thousands of millions of nerve cells."

"How amazing!" exclaimed Warqa.

Dr. Miyad continued, "You know that every cell has its own function but, at the same time, it cooperates with other cells. If some cells are damaged, the result will be bad."

"I never imagined that the brain was such a delicate structure."

Dr. Miyad noted, "A scientist lectured about the brain in 1957 and said that if all the world's telephones, telegraphs, radar systems and televisions were made into a small, complicated device, it would not be as complex as the brain."

"How wonderful for one to have such a marvelous apparatus in one's head. But what a pity it is that we know so little about our bodies."

"It may take a long time to discuss the human body. You know that the nervous system has a two-fold function: voluntary and involuntary. The nervous system controls the body's muscles, the hands, the feet, the tongue, etc.

Of course, some organs function automatically, such as the lungs, the heart, the stomach and so on. Here, the Wisdom of our Creator becomes manifest. If they functioned at the will of a creature, it would be impossible for him to motivate and monitor the processes of these organs all the time, even during sleep, thus they would cease to function.

"The same can be said of the organs which function voluntarily. If they functioned automatically, a human being would go on, for example, talking and talking all his life."

Warqa was very interested in the discussion and listened attentively. The doctor suggested that she read the whole book and told her that she would learn much about the body's secrets. In fact, Warqa wasn't very enthusiastic about reading, but Dr. Miyad said, "Hearing isn't enough. One should depend on one's brain to comprehend matters. If one listens more than one reads, then one will depend on others for knowledge."

Warqa's grandmother awoke, and both women approached her. Dr. Miyad asked her how she felt. She smiled and thanked the doctor for her help, saying, "I prayed for you. You have been kind to Warqa. I shall always remember that."

Dr. Miyad said, "Oh, I've done nothing. I pray that you will have a long life."

"What is your name, my dear?" she asked.

"Miyad."

"That's a nice name. What's your family name?" asked the grandmother.

The doctor didn't reply but said; "I'll see you everyday until you fully recover, which will be soon. God Willing, with Warqa's help." Dr. Miyad left and Warqa kept the book to read.

Chapter 3

A SICK FRIEND

The two young women's friendship grew stronger as time passed, and Warqa continued to ask the doctor about ideological questions. Then all of a sudden, the doctor stopped visiting her elderly patient. After three days, Warqa asked another doctor about Dr. Miyad. She told her that Dr. Miyad was ill. Warqa asked if she was at home, but the doctor told her that Dr. Miyad was in that same hospital. Warqa learned from a nurse that her friend was in room number seven.

"Is her illness serious?" Warqa asked.

"She has influenza," the nurse replied. "The doctor advised her to remain in bed for a few days."

Warqa made arrangements for the nurse to stay in her grandmother's room after 12 o'clock noon so that she could visit Dr. Miyad. Warqa thanked the nurse and went to room seven. When she knocked, she was surprised to see a young man open the door. She asked hesitantly,

"How is Dr. Miyad?"

The young man said, "Come in, she's awake."

Warqa entered the room, anxious to see her friend, who smiled and said, "I'm all right. How is your grandmother?"

"She's fine. She sends her regards and wishes you a speedy recovery."

As she sat down near the bed, Warqa noticed that Dr. Miyad's face and neck were flushed. It was the first time she had seen the doctor without her headscarf on. Warqa wanted to stay, but she thought about her grandmother and soon arose.

Dr. Miyad sensed her uneasiness, saying, "You mustn't leave your grandmother alone for long."

"But I don't want to leave you alone either."

"I'm not alone. My brother is here. When you leave, please tell him to come in."

"Where will I find him?" asked Warqa.

"He'll be in the reading room. His name is Sinad. He was the man who opened the door for you."

Warqa said, "Oh I thought he was a stranger, a doctor."

Dr. Miyad said, "He is a doctor, but he's also my brother. Otherwise, I wouldn't have allowed him to see me without my scarf on."

"I never thought of that."

"He left the room so that you would be at ease," Dr. Miyad remarked.

Warqa wished her friend good health and said goodbye. She saw Dr. Miyad's brother near the room and didn't speak to him, since he had seen her leave.

She hurried to her grandmother, who was still sleeping. When she awoke she asked Warqa about the doctor and Warqa said that she was very ill.

"Is she alone?" asked Warqa's grandmother.

"No. Her brother is with her, although he left the room when I entered."

"He seems polite," her grandmother remarked.

Chapter 4

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The following morning, Warqa visited Dr. Miyad and saw that she was feeling better. The doctor appreciated Warqa's visits. When Warqa expressed concern about her friend's health, Dr. Miyad said that she seemed upset.

"Oh that's to be expected."

"You are right. A lot of processes take place in the body when it is in such a state."

"What processes?"

"There is a network of nerves in the body. It carries impulses between the brain and all of the different parts of the body. Hence, sensations like cold, heat and pain are received through the nerves. There are millions of nerve cells carrying out this job."

"How do they function?" asked Warqa. "The brain is the centre of the nervous system. It controls all of the muscles and organs. Thus, when we touch something hot, the hand is withdrawn very quickly. We may not think much about such actions, but what the Creator has planned is really a source of wonder."

Dr. Miyad continued to speak. Warqa enjoyed listening to her simple explanations and wished she could stay longer, but she didn't want to tire the doctor.

Warqa said, "Your words are so interesting and I am in need of religious knowledge, especially about the Great Creator, since I lack such information. I can't answer the questions of skeptical people. At first, I planned to attend medical college, but my exam results weren't good enough."

"My religious knowledge has nothing to do with college," Dr. Miyad told her. "In fact, I knew many things before I went to the university."

"That's wonderful! You knew about your religion early on."

"Yes, from early childhood my brother encouraged me to read. He helped me to understand many difficult matters."

"Which of your brothers helped you?"

"I only have one brother. He always took care of me when I was sick. He's everything to me."

"May Allah protect you both," Warqa said.

Dr. Miyad added, "He has not gone to his clinic because of me. He stays near me when I'm sick."

"I thought he worked here."

"No, he has his own clinic."

Warqa looked at her watch. She felt that she had stayed long enough and that her grandmother might be in need of her. She got up, saying, "I'm sorry to leave you again. I must take care of my grandmother."

"Don't worry, my dear; my brother will soon come."

"Then I'll see you tomorrow," said Warqa.

"Please do come."

"I may trouble you with my questions."

"Not at all. I'll be happy to see you whenever you come."

When Warqa visited her friend the next day, she asked about her health and when she would begin work again.

"I feel fine, except for some pain near my spleen. I'm waiting for my laboratory results."

Warqa said, "I hope nothing is wrong with your spleen, although I think this organ is not very important."

Dr. Miyad smiled and said, "On the contrary, it is very important. Every organ God has created has its own importance."

"The spleen is similar to a movable graveyard, really. It receives the dead red blood cells, which usually die after two months. It is interesting to see the iron particles carry the dead cells for burial and return to produce new ones."

"Do the iron particles produce red cells?"

"No," said Dr. Miyad, "but it is helpful in their manufacture. The main process involved in making the red and even the white blood cells takes place in the bone marrow. So you can see what a wonderful factory there is inside the human body. Each organ has its own special function."

"Please continue," urged Warqa.

"The cardiac system exchanges the gases through the circulation of blood. Oxygen is carried to the tissues by the blood and, on the way back to the heart, remnants of burnt out tissues are transported in place of the oxygen."

"You mean that the blood's circulation helps the digestive system?"

"Yes, that's what I mean," replied Dr. Miyad.

"The respiratory system helps as well. We breathe as long as we are alive, yet we never think about the Creator's design of our breathing apparatus. The necessary gas, oxygen, is provided and carbon dioxide is removed. Hence, our blood is purified and whatever substance is useless is discarded. It is the delicate design of Allah. Consider the digestive system. We eat and drink whatever we like, but we forget that Merciful Allah has given us the organs, which make use of starches, proteins, fats, minerals, water and vitamins. These organs remove the unwanted waste products from the body."

Warqa then asked, "What about the liver?"

"The liver is a large reddish-brown organ which secretes bile and purifies the blood. It is similar to a defence front." Dr. Miyad hesitated, giving Warqa time to think. Then she asked how her grandmother was. Warqa replied that she was much better and that that was why she was able to leave her for a while. Her grandmother wanted Warqa to go back and attend her college lectures from the coming week, but Warqa had not yet made up her mind about it.

Dr. Miyad said, "You have been absent from your studies for a long time. You should return to them. I'll be near her while you are away."

"Poor grandma," said Warqa. "She has tried hard to give me a comfortable life. She loves me very much, but I feel so lonely, since I am her only grand daughter.

Her son, my father died when I was one year old, and my mother died shortly after my birth."

"Neither of us has a sister, let's be sisters to each other."

Warqa's face brightened as she asked, "Will you have me as your sister?"

"With great pleasure," the doctor replied.

"That's settled then. I wanted you to read this book." She held out a book entitled '**Perfection in Islam**' towards Warqa, who took it and said good-bye.

Two days later, Dr. Miyad had recovered and was once again on duty, and she made a point to visit Warqa's grandmother every day while Warqa was at college. Warqa read the religious book and asked her friend for another volume. She really wanted to understand what she had read, and spent many hours at the hospital, reading and discussing

various questions with Dr. Miyad. Warqa was greatly influenced by the doctor and longed to be with her always. One day she asked the doctor, "Is it true that the body's cells change?"

"Yes. Everything: the cells, the blood, the fat, the proteins, even the nerve cells are changed. Basically, the complete body structure is renewed and replaced every ten years."

Warqa commented, "Even the nerve cells. Does that mean a person could forget his previous knowledge and memories? "

"This is one of the mysteries of creation, and because of this we can understand that memory is not matter, and that it cannot be explained. It is a spiritual phenomenon with no physical characteristics. If it was matter attached to the nerve cell, then one would forget everything with the passage of time. One would have to re-learn everything again and again, even one's name and one's father's name. The average human being gathers nearly half a million pictures in his memory each day. Thus, tens of billions of images are stored in his memory during his lifetime, in addition to the other information received through the other senses."

Warqa was listening attentively and said: "What an enormous number! It's difficult to believe."

"It is an enormous amount. Some scientists say the memory can hold enough information to fill nine million volumes. Consider how great is the wisdom of the Creator."

Then Warqa asked, "With such facts, can't we prove the existence of Almighty Allah to unbelievers?"

"It can be," said Dr. Miyad. "But some may even deny the existence of the universe. They deny such a reality and think that everything is an illusion."

"Who are these people?"

"They are those who deny the Creator, the universe and themselves. They doubt the existence of everything and try to persuade others to consider everything as merely a dream or as their imagination. In any case, we can refute their claims by ascertaining whether or not they are sure of such claims."

"Of course, they are sure," Warqa, commented.

"If they are sure, then they profess certainty in some matters, which is in contrast to their claims of doubt. This then devalues their doctrine of belief."

"That's quite true," said Warqa. "Please continue."

Dr. Miyad said, "We can ask them whether they consider our profession of faith to be in opposition to theirs or not. If they agree that there is a contradiction, then they must also agree that these opposites cannot meet. This is a fact, which cannot be doubted, and, therefore, it follows that certain statements cannot be denied. If they say that there is no such impossibility, the two parties may both be right. Then those who believe in the Creator can also be right."

"That's logical," said Warqa.

"There are other proofs which we can discuss later, when we meet again, God willing."

Warqa said, "I know you are very busy but I am really looking forward to our next chat."

"Which will be on the day after tomorrow," said the doctor. "Meanwhile you can read this book."

Warqa took the book and left. She read the book carefully and thought seriously about it. At their next meeting, Warqa was ready to listen to her friend. She welcomed her warmly and they sat close together to continue their discussion.

Dr. Miyad began, "Those who doubt the existence of everything should be asked to prove their doubt. If they cannot, then their claims are groundless."

"But suppose they can," said Warqa.

"If they say they can, then they should be asked if there is a relationship between the proof and its outcome. If there is no relationship, then it is of no value. But if they claim there is, then they must believe in a cause that brought about such a result. Thus, there is a law of cause and effect."

Warqa noted, "They may reject such a law."

"They must have evidence to do so," said Dr. Miyad.

"Otherwise, their claim is groundless. If they can produce, evidence, then they are confessing to the law of cause and effect. "

"I should take notes," said Warqa.

"That's a good idea," agreed Dr. Miyad. "You won't forget various points"

Chapter 5

A PROPOSAL

Warqa stopped writing and looked at her friend, waiting for more information. However, Dr. Miyad said,

"Now it is your turn to help me."

"I am ready. How?" asked Warqa.

"It is about my brother, Sinad. I am thinking about a wife for him."

"How can I assist you in this matter?"

"Well," said Dr. Miyad, "you know that my brother is very dear to me. He is a good believer and is well mannered. He is loving, compassionate and calm. I want to help him find a good wife, and I have recently found someone."

"Thank God for that," said Warqa.

Dr. Miyad continued, "However, I would like to know whether both sides would be happy with such an agreement. I want to persuade the girl; can you help?"

"How?"

Dr. Miyad explained, "You persuade her to marry him. She can trust me with regard to his righteousness."

"But who is she?" asked Warqa. "Where can I find her?"

"Can't you guess?" asked the doctor with a smile.

"She is very close to you."

Warqa blushed, cast her glance down and remained silent.

Dr. Miyad continued, "You have guessed. Why don't you answer? Haven't we already agreed to be as sisters? Don't you trust me? Believe me, I care a lot about your future, just as I care for my brother's. I have thought carefully about the matter and I am sure that it is right for both of you. You can ask whoever you like about his character."

Warqa said shyly, "I am sure of your good intentions; I am just taken by surprise, as I never thought about this before. I must speak with my grandmother."

"The important thing is that you are convinced," Dr. Miyad stressed.

Warqa wanted to say, "Yes!", but she thought it would be better to think the matter over. "Please give me some time to think about this," she said.

"Of course, you have the right to think and then decide. But when can I have the answer?"

"Within a few days," said Warqa.

"All right, my dear. I hope your decision is for your own good."

Warqa smiled and said, "I have never thought about my own affairs. My grandmother has made me depend on her for everything."

Dr. Miyad told her, "You should think for yourself with regard to your future."

"Yes, I will make my own decision. In any case, knowledge is gained through experience."

"That is not always the right criteria," said Dr. Miyad.

"Why not?"

"This is what the experimentalists claim. They don't believe in any fact without experimenting, even though they ignore the fact that their doctrine indicates the possibility of believing in matters without the least experiment."

Surprised, Warqa said, "Please explain more. We have a female lecturer at our school who always insists on this subject."

"I will tell you tomorrow." Dr. Miyad replied.

"Now it is time for me to check on my patients, so I will see you later."

Chapter 6

AN OBSTACLE

Warqa sat thinking of her friend's proposal. She asked herself happily, 'should I agree, and become her brother's wife? Will he help me to understand Islam and lead me to the right path? How lucky I am!' She almost scolded herself for not agreeing immediately, as no obstacle stood in the way. She spent some time daydreaming and then her grandmother awoke. Warqa assisted her and then she sat down, anxious to tell her the happy news. She began by saying, "Dr. Miyad has been here; she just left."

"Oh," said her grandmother indifferently.

"She had something special to ask me."

"What was that?" asked her grandmother.

"A marriage proposal."

Warqa's grandmother looked annoyed and said, "What does it have to do with you?"

"It concerns her brother."

"What relationship is there between you and her brother?" said her grandmother angrily.

Amazed at her anger, Warqa said, "She wants me to marry him."

"What was your answer?"

Warqa was confused by her attitude and told her, "I postponed the answer until I could consult you."

Her grandmother turned her face away and said, "No. This marriage must not take place."

"But why not, grandma?"

Her grandmother did not answer her, so Warqa insisted, "Why shouldn't it -please tell me why you disapprove, because I am convinced that I should accept this proposal." Still her grandmother didn't speak.

"Why don't you talk to me? Perhaps you are mistaken," said Warqa

"I am not mistaken," said her grandmother. "I know what I am saying and you must give up this idea. It will not happen, so do not mention it again."

Warqa was silent for a moment and then said, "Don't I have the right to know why? It is not easy for me to decide without knowing the reason for your refusal."

"Of course, you have the right to know. Are you ready to hear?"

Warqa nodded, and her grandmother said, "However, after hearing what I have to say, you must end your relationship with Dr. Miyad."

Warqa was shocked at the idea and said, "But why? She is my best friend!"

"Then don't insist upon knowing the reason."

After a moment Warqa agreed, "All right. I am ready to hear what you have to say." "When you were a child, your father died, as you know. But you never learned how he died. He had a good friend, and they decided to go into business together. They opened a workshop making unbreakable plates. He was happy and optimistic about the business, but did not have the necessary funds. Because of his experience, your father's friend was to provide the technical skill. In order to raise the money for the project, your father had to sell half of the fertile land that he owned.

"However, the half was less than that officially approved for selling. So the landlord, Mr. Hamid, bought that half on the condition that the whole area be registered in his name. He was to give us half of the produce of the land, while your father retained the right to buy it back when the debt was repaid. The land could not be sold to anyone else, because it was in Mr. Hamid's name."

"The money was not sufficient for the workshop and your father mortgaged his house on the condition that Mr. Hamid would get half of the land's produce. Your father and his friend became the night watchmen for the factory. One morning, I went to the factory, where I saw a crowd of people at the entrance and a police car was parked there also. I entered the building and to my surprise and horror, your father lay on the floor, dying. I rushed to his side. His partner was crying crocodile tears. I bent over your father to talk to him, but he did not speak. He was taken to the hospital and on the way he opened his eyes, looked at me and said the name of his murderer: Abdul Majid Muhammad Rajie, Dr. Miyad's father."

Shocked and dismayed, Warqa cried out, "Oh no, it could not be her father!"

"Yes, her father, I was one of the witnesses in court, but one witness was not enough proof. He proved to the court that he was not at the factory at any time that day that the murder occurred. He lied and, heated often. The crime was recorded as a robbery." "Was anything stolen?"

"Yes, of course," her grandmother replied. "Money and important documents were taken from a safe. So we lost the land and the right to buy it back, as well as the ownership of the house. Mr. Hamid managed to produce papers proving his ownership of the property, but we could not get it back. With regard to the house, Mr. Hamid has been patient and understanding all these years. He has an aim, but only God knows what it is.

"I knew that Abdul Majid had twins, a boy and a girl. That is why I asked the doctor what her father's name was. She ignored my question. I asked a nurse what Dr. Miyad's father's name was and she told me. Now, are you ready to marry the son of the man who murdered your father?"

Warqa bitterly replied, "I won't marry him, but I will remain friends with Dr. Miyad," she cried quietly and thought about her friend. She spent a very sad day thinking about all she had heard. She said to herself, 'what is their guilt in their father's crime? If their father was a criminal, why should they pay for his misdeed? What can I say to Dr. Miyad? How can I explain my refusal of her brother's proposal? Should I tell her the truth? Perhaps they know nothing about this matter; how can I explain it to them?

"She remembered that she was to meet Dr. Miyad the following day. She felt that if she lost the doctor's friendship, it would be a great loss. Warqa spent a sleepless night. The next morning she visited her grandmother, who was planning to leave the hospital the same day, without the doctor's permission. Warqa could not make her change her mind. She searched for Dr. Miyad, but to no avail. Dr. Miyad was on 24-hour leave. Warqa could not leave without saying good-bye to her dear friend, so she decided to write a letter to her to express her gratitude. She wrote:

Dear Dr. Miyad,

I don't know what to tell you. I am facing a dilemma and I can find no solution. My grandmother insists on leaving today, so there is no chance to see you. It is as if Almighty Allah has deprived me of His paradise. I am very sad and broken-hearted about my sudden departure. May Allah help me.

Please don't be angry about my behavior. I have been forced to act thusly. As for your brother, I hope he will find someone better be his wife. I have no particular reason for refusing him. It is just Allah's will.

If you still think of me as a sister, please write to me.

Your sincere sister Warqa

Warqa gave the letter to a nurse and begged her to give it to Dr. Miyad, than she left the hospital with her grandmother.

The days dragged on. Since her grandmother was not completely well. Warqa had to look after her in addition to attending to her college studies. She was sad and anxious to hear from Dr. Miyad. Her grandmother sometimes saw tears in Warqa's eyes, but she never asked about them. A week passed, and a letter arrived from the doctor which said :

Dear Warqa,

Assalamu alaikum.

I was very stunned by your letter. Now that the shock is over, I am writing to you. It was hard for me to see you leave without a good-bye. I cannot give up your friendship so easily. You are like a sweet-smelling flower that should fill the spring air with its beautiful scent. If such a flower lacks the hand, which waters it and the shade, which keeps away the sun's rays, it may not blossom and may fade away before it fulfills its role in life.

I feel a spiritual pull towards someone who needs my help. It is my duty to respond, and I am ready to help. You have indeed become a sister to me, and you have brought me happiness. I wanted you to become my brother's wife, but suddenly, without any warning, you disappeared and left only a few written lines. The shock was too great to tolerate, so it took me some time to answer your letter.

I thought the matter over and found I must strengthen our friendship. You should know that I am still your loving sister. I won't ask for an explanation for fear it may hurt you. You are so dear to me. Please keep writing to me at the hospital address. May Allah keep you well and safe.

Miyad

Warqa felt a little happier after reading the letter. She decided not to tell her grandmother about the letter. That night, she wrote to her friend:

Dear Miyad,

God only knows how I long to see you and how sorry I am about this situation. I have indeed been thirsty and in need of water. I found a spring to give me water and it was you. Then time's cruel hand denied me water. I am again suffering from terrible loneliness, though I have always needed someone who would value my feelings; someone I can talk openly to and confide in, who can lead me on the right path and allow me to rest under his shade. When I first saw you, I thought of you as the real sister of my dreams. I loved you and felt at ease with you. I really appreciated your friendship. Then life changed the game and I was deprived of you. I am again sad and lonely. Life is unkind to me - it takes whatever is dear to me and this war has no truce.

I suffered so until I received your letter this morning. It gave me hope again. You drew me towards yourself and then to my Creator, hence it is difficult to keep away from you. I rejoiced at your letter and learnt another lesson of sacrifice and unselfishness, a practical stance, which pays no heed to personal gain. I thank God first and then you, dear sister. I am still ready to meet with you at any time and anywhere that you suggest.

Your sister forever, Warqa

ANOTHER MEETING

Warqa posted the letter the following day and waited for Miyad to fix a date for their next meeting. A letter soon arrived and Warqa planned to meet her friend at the hospital the next day. Warqa told her grandmother she would be late in coming home and she went to the hospital directly from college. She waited a moment to calm down and then knocked on the doctor's door. Dr. Miyad met her with a bright face, and Warqa felt like crying. The doctor said, "Welcome, dear. I have missed you very much, as if I had lived with you all my life."

"I have also suffered a lot. God knows how worried I was that you might be angry at me."

"Why should I?" asked Dr. Miyad. "You are free to make your own choice. Perhaps you think that my brother is not good enough for you."

"Please don't say that. What happened was not my own decision. I was satisfied with what you told me about him."

"What then?"

"It was my grandmother," Warqa confessed.

"Has she given a reason?"

Warqa became confused and remained silent, but the doctor repeated her question and Warqa told her, "There is a reason."

"A good enough reason for your refusal?"

"Yes."

"Then I won't insist on discussing it further. Let us keep our friendship," said Dr. Miyad.

"Yes, please. I feel quite at ease with you. I was very upset these past few days. I have many girlfriends, but you are the most trustworthy one. I have had difficult times, but never one such as giving up your friendship."

"Forget it, and be sure of our friendship," said Dr. Miyad reassuringly.

"Now we must continue our discussion," said Warqa. "You promised to explain the relationship between empiricists and science."

"What do you know about empiricists?" asked the doctor.

"They rely on observation and experiments, not on theory. They deny the role of brain and rational reasoning. Every issue should be proved through experimenting." "Right," said Dr. Miyad. "So we shall refer to this fact in our arguments. If a piece of iron is kept near fire, it expands, so the general rule is that fire causes the expansion of metals. This is accepted through observation of iron, but the general rule is a mental calculation. The brain produces such knowledge."

"It is quite interesting," noted Warqa. Dr. Miyad continued, "There is something else; the thesis and anti-thesis doctrine. Opponents never agree. This is a basic fact in mathematics and without it this science would be nullified."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we cannot say that the water in this glass, for example, is both hot and cold. It is either hot or cold. We cannot say that the sun is both bright and dark at the same time, or that something is long and short."

"What does this have to do with mathematics?"

"For instance, we say that one plus one equals two; a basic fact in this science. We cannot say one plus one equals three, it is in contradiction with the symbol meaning equal to. It is a well-known fact. So the empiricist either believes it or doesn't. If he does, is it from experimenting?"

"So it is impossible to bring opposites together."

"Yes," said Dr. Miyad. "Such a result is the outcome of rational reasoning, which needs no experiment. Warqa then said, "It may be the result of long experience. Opposites in the universe cannot be found together."

"Such a thing may indicate the non-existence of opposites being together, not the probability of such an occurrence. Such a thing can never be the result of experimentation."

"What if they believe in its possibility?" asked Warqa.

"Then they might abolish the most important science: mathematics."

Dr. Miyad was silent for several minutes to give Warqa time to think about the discussion. Warqa was interested in the subject and had listened attentively. She said, "I was in need of such information and I still need more."

"When will you come again then?" asked Dr. Miyad. "I will come as soon as I get the chance. Now I should go home, my grandmother might be worried."

Warqa visited Dr. Miyad from time to time. One day she arrived home late and found that her grandmother was angry and demanded to know where she had been. Warqa guessed that her grandmother knew of her visits to Dr. Miyad and waited for her to say so. "Why are you asking me, grandma?" she inquired.

"Have you come directly from the college?"

Warqa did not lie, but simply replied, "No."

"From the hospital," said Warqa.

"I know that you see Dr. Miyad often," said her grandmother angrily. "Admit it. I thought you were wise enough not to meet with the daughter of your father's murderer."

Warqa said quietly, "How did you guess?"

"I asked your friends."

"What's wrong with that? I refused the proposal of her brother, but I won't give up her friendship. I need a sister, and there is nothing wrong in that."

"You are not interested in the girl but in her brother, who is an attractive gentleman," her grandmother remarked.

"That is not fair!" cried Warqa. "I have only seen him twice, quite by chance. I beg you to stop imagining things."

The next day Miyad waited for Warqa to come, and when she saw her, she noticed how pale Warqa looked. "What is wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing. I was up late last night. Please continue with your talk."

"You are in a hurry, it seems. Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing," Warqa replied.

Dr. Miyad began, "The empiricists don't even believe in authenticated matters." "What are authenticated matters?" asked Warqa.

"Matters, which are true beyond a doubt. In fact, any authentic fact needs a preceding fact and so on, until we come to a starting point. Otherwise, we can't receive any kind of knowledge."

"How is that?"

"Suppose you want to become acquainted with a particular girl and you want to know about her conduct. Where would you get such information?"

"I'd ask her friends," said Warqa.

"You may contact a friend of hers indirectly, through someone else. It is logical that your enquiry might end with someone you know. This is the starting point."

"Quite right," Warqa admitted.

"This is the case with authenticated matters. There should be a starting point well-known, with the least experimenting."

Warqa then asked, "Can you give me an example?"

"For instance, if we say that a part of a book is smaller than the whole, someone might say: 'How do you know?' This is quite simple. Since we refer to a part, surely there must be a whole."

"If simple facts need no experiments, since the brain comprehends them," Warqa asked, "then why can't a person learn these facts at an early age? Why can't they be retained until old age?"

Dr. Miyad explained, "There are two types of mental faculties: reasoning comprehension and imaginary comprehension. We can perceive such things as water, flowers, gold and so on, through our senses."

"And we can imagine unreal objects, such as a sea of milk or a mountain of mercury," added Warqa. "Here comes the perceived information through the power of the senses. But, again, we depend on previously received information. We cannot say, for example, there is a date palm without imagining the date tree first. It depends on imaginative perception. That is why a child cannot comprehend authentic information; he cannot imagine the actual thing."

"It is so interesting to listen to you, but I am afraid I cannot stay any longer," said Warqa.

"We can continue tomorrow," the doctor said.

Warqa said good-bye and left. When she reached home, her grandmother was quite upset. Warqa kissed her and said, "Please don't be angry at my seeing Dr. Miyad. I will obey all your other wishes." Then her grandmother asked, "You will obey me in other matters?"

"Yes, except with regard to Dr. Miyad."

"Will you swear to that?" asked her grandmother.

Warqa was about to swear that she would when something stopped her. "I won't swear, but I do promise. That is sufficient."

"You will keep your word of honour, won't you?" asked her grandmother.

"I will do that," said Warqa. Her grandmother's face brightened and she kissed her granddaughter with an easy mind. She told herself, 'She has promised to obey me. I am sure she will accept her cousin's proposal. Poor man, I was the cause of the delay until now. I was waiting for Warqa to finish her studies, but he has again expressed his wish to marry her. He is rich and educated, even though he is not religious. She can

guide him to the right path. When she marries, she will have no time to see Dr. Miyad."

The next afternoon, Warqa attended some lectures and went to see Dr. Miyad again. The doctor was waiting for her at the hospital door and she greeted her, saying, "We shall go home together. I have some work to do."

"Whose home?"

"My home, of course," said Dr. Miyad.

"Will anyone else be there?" asked Warqa.

"No one, be sure of that. We will leave before sunset."

"As you like," Warqa agreed.

"It is not far; we can walk."

They soon reached the doctor's home and she unlocked the door. It was a small home with a tidy little garden. The house furniture was simple but in good taste. Warqa asked, "Who cleans your home for you?" "I come here twice a week," said the doctor. "I usually clean it myself and arrange it for my brother."

"Does he live alone?" Warqa asked.

"Yes, I am his only sister. We are alone in the world." Warqa felt sorry for them. She knew that the doctor was lonely but tried to conceal it.

Warqa was deep in thought when the doctor said, "What is the matter? Won't you give me a hand?"

Warqa was happy to help her friend. When they finished their work, they sat in the shade of a tree. Warqa was looking at a small orange tree in front of her and Dr. Miyad said, "I planted that tree and I am very happy that it is bearing fruit."

"It is nice to see plants grow, flourish and bear fruit," Warqa commented.

"But how sad it is to see such trees uprooted by a wicked hand or a strong storm."

"Oh yes," agreed Warqa. "But I want to ask a question. Is it you or the seed that caused the plant to grow?"

Dr. Miyad answered, "Neither I nor the seed. Almighty Allah has done it. We are only means created by Him. He created the whole universe, and caused all things to come into existence."

"How wise our Creator is. I don't know how some people can deny His existence and relate existence to causes other than Him, such as

materialists who claim that the unceasing motion of matter has made all creatures."

"Such people, if they think rationally, will confess that Allah has designed all life. Sometimes they agree with us on the rudiments of a subject, but they differ at the outcome," said Dr. Miyad.

"In what ways do they agree?"

"They, too, agree that we have not come from nothing; that there is an everlasting One Who created life. One who is the Owner of the things that He bestows upon us. What we have cannot have come from nothing. These are matters they agree with us upon. What do we believers say?"

Warqa said, "We say Allah is the Creator."

"The materialists claim that the everlasting motion of matter is the cause of life. One could ask them: When did it start to create countless living creatures? If it is everlasting, how, then, can it have a beginning?"

"They cannot answer that," said Warqa.

Dr. Miyad continued, "Science says that the earth separated from the sun billions of years ago, and that it took one billion years for the earth's surface to cool."

"That means that life on this earth had a beginning," noted Warqa.

"Yes. Such scientific facts are undisputable. Thus, if motion is everlasting, then creation must be everlasting."

"Otherwise, scientists could not have calculated the age of this planet," Warqa added. "This fact cannot be denied. But if the materialists confess that motion is not everlasting, it must be something separate from and, hence, added to matter. Then we can ask: Who has created motion? How could it create when it itself was created? How can they claim motion is the source of creation?"

Warqa asked, "Suppose they say that motion is everlasting and that matter designated the time of creation."

"This is unacceptable," said Dr. Miyad, "for creation is a process, the result of great Wisdom; substance is not."

"How can a person prove that matter lacks intelligence?"

"Science has proved that it is comprised of electrical charges," said the doctor. "Hence it cannot think or comprehend. According to our belief, it is under some influence, which causes its motion and existence."

Warqa suggested, "They might say that the beginning of creation was postponed in order to prepare the rudiments, like a traveller who begins

his journey four hours later than he intended. Maybe the matter needed time in order to create life."

"What prevented it from starting earlier?" asked Dr. Miyad.

"Well, like the traveller who was delayed because he needed time to prepare for the journey, so life came into existence after billions of years," said Warqa.

Dr. Miyad replied, "The answer suits the traveller, but not in the case of the universe, because it is claimed that time exists through everlasting motion. Such answers could be true if the universe actually did begin in a manner similar to that of the traveler, which would mean that motion is accidental and that time is limited; an excuse for a late start."

"Thank you for this explanation. By the way, sometimes I hate time, because it moves so quickly, as in the case of our meetings," laughed Warqa.

"I hope you won't be late," said Dr. Miyad. "Let us leave now. We will come here again sometimes, just for a change."

Chapter 8

CONFLICT

When Warqa arrived at home, her grandmother met her at the door and said, "We have visitors. Go upstairs and get ready, then come down right away."

"Who are the visitors?"

"Mr. Mahir, a cousin of your parents."

"What does that have to do with me?" Warqa asked.

"He is your cousin too."

"It makes no difference to me," said Warqa. "He is a stranger and I don't want to sit and talk with him for no reason."

"Who said there is no reason? He is a wonderful man-educated, understanding and rich," said Warqa's grandmother.

"That is enough for you to welcome him!" said Warqa.

Her grandmother took hold of her and said, "I won't let you go until you promise to come down. You promised to obey me. Come on now and say 'salam'."

"That is all," said Warqa. She walked into the living room and saw Mr. Mahir and his mother sitting near each other, facing the door. She murmured a few words of welcome as her cousin stood up and asked her to take a seat. Her grandmother said approvingly, "Come here and sit by your cousin."

Warqa did not move, but said politely, "I am sorry," I have a lot of homework to do. Excuse me, good-bye." With that, she left the room, and her grand mother became vexed and the guests confused.

Warqa ran quickly up the stairs to her room and burst into tears. She did not know how to get out of this difficult situation. She would not accept Mr. Mahir as a husband since he had loose morals and was not a committed Muslim. It was impossible for her to accept him. She decided to fight the battle, no matter how difficult it might be. An hour later, her grandmother came up to her room. She spoke gently to her, saying, "You have not behaved well today. It wasn't right to treat your cousin that

way; you were hard on him, while he loves and respects you. He only wanted to introduce himself to you."

Warqa told her, "I don't like him. He is not a committed Muslim."

"You are mistaken," said her grandmother. "He is a gentleman and is rich and successful. He has no relatives except his mother. Just imagine, he has three private cars!" "That is exactly why I think he is worthless! What needs would anyone have for three cars?!"

Her grandmother ignored Warqa and continued, "A few months ago, he asked for your hand in marriage. I suggested to him to wait until you finished your studies. Now that you are taking your final exams, he has renewed his request. He is ready to offer a very high dowry, in addition to a special car of your own."

"Are you serious? " asked Warqa. "Did you think I might agree to marry him? His wealth and his cars won't tempt me at all to sacrifice my religion."

"What does religion have to do with it?"

"You know he is not a committed person. He does not even pray."

"It isn't for you to judge him. He, too, has a God who will call him to account."

"I won't marry such a person-be sure of that," insisted Warqa.

Her grandmother persisted, "He is very respected. I know he is not a committed person, but he can't harm you. Think it over a while so you won't regret refusing him." "I'll never regret it," stressed Warqa.

"If you don't get the man of your dreams, Warqa, what will you do?"

"Then I won't marry. Anyway, it is quite possible to marry the man I wish."

"You are still a child. You should not reject your cousin's offer from sheer nonsense."

Warqa smiled bitterly and said, "Why do you think it is nonsense? I refused Sinad because you said his father killed my father. Yet he has done no harm to my father. Mr. Mahir has committed a crime against his Creator; he is an infidel who disobeys and disrespects Allah. He mocks the Hereafter. My religion is the dearest thing I have, even dearer than my father. How could I live with someone who is my enemy?" Her grandmother was quite annoyed by this time as she said, "You still speak well of sinad? I know you have rejected Mahir because of him!"

Warqa replied, "I speak well of him because he deserves it. But to say that I have refused Mahir because of him is not true. To me, that is finished. He may be planning to marry someone else for all I know."

"He is good and praiseworthy although he is the son of your father's murderer? Mahir is your cousin and so you should consider the matter seriously. You will do your father, as well as me, a great injustice if you refuse him."

Warqa did not sleep well that night. The next day, she visited Dr. Miyad and she forgot about her troubles for a while. She did not tell her friend about Mahir, but listened carefully to the useful discussion. She asked, "Will you please continue where we left off last time?"

Dr. Miyad said, "You don't seem to be happy today. I am afraid you won't enjoy the subject."

"I will enjoy it," insisted Warqa. "I intend to forget my problems by listening to you. The best times for me are when I am learning something new."

"Let us argue with them then," said Dr. Miyad.

"With whom?"

"With the materialists who claim that life was created through the motion of matter, which is everlasting. We can ask them to explain the different stages of that matter and the different outcomes, while matter has only one simple stage."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that through chemical processes and a combination of gases, new substances may result. Through radiation, a compound substance may produce a new one. Hence, we have a chain of elements and minerals that stops at a certain stage."

"Why does it stop?" asked Warqa.

"Well, this is the question we must answer. They claim that development is the result of a conflict between the original direction and its opposite, or through unification. For instance, through just such a process, hydrogen combines with other gases to produce various compounds.

"But the amazing thing is why doesn't all the hydrogen combine and disappear in the process? Here we come to know that there is an Everlasting, Wise Power that designed everything. Science has proved that electricity is merely negative and positive charges, therefore, it is not an intelligent source of power. It can't have created such a mighty universe as this."

Warqa's silence prompted the doctor to ask her if anything was wrong

"Nothing at all," replied Warqa.

"I hope you will always be strong," Dr. Miyad said.

"With the help of Allah, I will. I feel better when I talk with you. It makes me strong."

"But you are pale," said the doctor. "I'll give you some pills. Dissolve one in a cup of water and drink it once a day."

"Oh, I should remember that you are a physician. I think of you as a psychiatrist," Warqa said.

"I am prouder of this than of being a doctor."

"It is time to leave," said Warqa. "I can't come tomorrow, I have lessons in the afternoon, so I will see you the day after tomorrow, God willing."

"You will find me waiting for you."

Warqa's grandmother did not discuss the subject of marriage that day. Warqa was low-spirited and tired, so she went to bed early. The next morning she got ready and left for college. At the bus stop, an expensive car stopped near her and Mr. Mahir got out of the car and came up to her. "Good morning, Warqa," he said. "It is good to see you. Can I give you a lift?"

"No thank you, Mr. Mahir," Warqa declined.

"Come on, get in. Are you waiting for anyone?"

"I am waiting for the bus," Warqa said.

"How strange!" Mr. Mahir remarked. "You are waiting for a bus and refuse a ride in a car?"

His words increased her contempt for him, and Warqa turned her head away, saying, "Please don't trouble yourself. I won't get in your car."

"There is no trouble in giving you a life," he persisted. "It would be a pleasure for me. Consider the car as being yours and get in."

At that moment the bus arrived and Warqa boarded it. She left Mahir bewildered by her behaviour.

When Warqa saw Dr. Miyad the following day, she felt uncomfortable and was in poor spirits. She found her friend busy cleaning the house and she tried to help the doctor, but Dr. Miyad noticed her discomfort and begged Warqa to rest on a seat in the garden, where she sat looking dejected and depressed.

"What is the matter with you?" Dr. Miyad asked.

"I am upset," Warqa replied.

"That is obvious. But you should not take anything too seriously -be strong."

"I am strong. But some disappointments make me tired. A cousin of my parents has recently asked me to marry him and my grandmother approves of him, since she says he is rich, young and educated."

"Is he a good Muslim," asked Dr. Miyad.

"No, he is not. That is why I am upset. I have refused him, but my grandmother never stops bringing up the issue. He is trying to impose himself on me, and I feel as if I am at battle."

"With whom?"

"With my grandmother and her displeasure."

"I feared it was a war within yourself," said Dr. Miyad.

"No, the matter is quite clear to me," Warqa said.

"I hope so, It is better to face such a situation now then to have to tolerate it permanently," Dr.Miyad noted.

"Do you mean as a result of marrying an unbeliever?"

"Yes, of course. Such a marriage could affect both your life now and in the Hereafter."

"I only wish I could make my grandmother see my point of view."

Dr. Miyad said, "She would not accept it. She believes in her own view. You should try gently to make her give up the idea."

"But she is so determined! Warqa replied. "She won't give up, but I will continue to resist."

"Why does she insist so? How will she benefit from such a marriage?" asked Dr. Miyad.

Warqa did not answer her. She thought her grand- mother's reason was to keep her away from her friend, Miyad, but she could not mention it. To change the subject, Warqa said, "Yes, there is a reason for everything. That is why those who deny the existence of the Creator claim that matter created itself."

Dr. Miyad said, "Yet they sometimes agree eventually with those who believe in Almighty Allah."

"How is that?"

"Both parties believe that the universe has been created, which means that there is some influential power behind it. They also agree that the universe is a reality, which is in contrast with what idealists believe that is a dream or an illusion.

"They both also believe that human life depend on this Power which caused life to exist; however, both sides differ with regard to the nature of this Power."

"Do materialists admit such a belief in their literature?" asked Warqa.

"Yes," said the doctor. "In some of their books on religion they say: 'In fact, we must confess that we know nothing about the origin of the universe'."

"Is this common knowledge among them?"

"Yes. The materialists claim that matter and its motion are behind creation, while we believe that Almighty Allah is," said Dr. Miyad.

"Matter can't last forever, since it can change," said Warqa. "The eternal, the everlasting does not change."

"That is right. Mutable things must have a beginning and an end," said Dr. Miyad. Warqa continued, "Physics has proved that the atom is made up of an electron and a proton, and that it can be split to produce energy. Hence, matter is not everlasting, it is a compound."

"For argument's sake," said Dr. Miyad, "we can ask the materialists how the first compound came into existence. Was it everlasting originally, or did its components come first?"

"One might say that its components came first," suggested Warqa.

"In that case, there must have been a reason which caused its existence."

Warqa then said, "Suppose one says that the parts and the whole existed simultaneously?"

"Then we must ask if these parts can be separated either by transformation or development, such as the chemical processes which break water down into oxygen and hydrogen. It is quite possible for a compound to dissolve and vanish, so it can't be everlasting. The everlasting cannot be affected. Whatsoever depends upon a cause may disappear, as in the case of the atom," concluded Dr Miyad.

"Science has also recently proved that there is a continuous change in heat energy, which proves that the universe is not everlasting," said Warqa.

Dr. Miyad commented, "Yes. This change in temperature proves such facts. Had the temperature remained the same, the whole universe would have suffered the same degree of heat for ages. Life would thus have been impossible."

Warqa then said, "Through various calculations, science has proved that the universe is expanding and that it is not everlasting. Otherwise, the planets would have been separated by unlimited spaces." Dr. Miyad ended the conversation by adding, "The universe has been created by an everlasting Power, Almighty Allah."

Warqa glanced at her watch and said, "I am sorry I have to leave now. I won't see you for a week. I will be preparing for the final exams."

"I wish you success. I will be waiting for you the following week, God willing." That week Warqa was quite busy with her studies. She thought only of her finals and she even forgot all about Mr. Mahir. She passed her exams successfully and at the end of the week she went to see Dr. Miyad, but could not find her, so she left a note saying that she would see her the next afternoon. Warqa returned home to find her grandmother happy that she had finished her studies. She kissed Warqa warmly and said, "I am still alive to see you become an engineer."

"I have not got the results yet," Warqa said with a smile.

"I am sure you will succeed."

Warqa went up to her room and found a large crystal vase filled with beautiful flowers on her table. Next to the vase was a small white box and a note on which was written: 'To Warqa, with much love... Mahir.'

Warqa knew that the gift was serious. She went downstairs and asked her grandmother, "Who brought this bouquet of flowers for me?"

"Mr. Mahir's chauffeur. He said Mr. Mahir and his mother will visit us this evening."

"Where is his house?" Warqa asked.

"Why? I don't know where his new house is. Why do you ask?"

"So I can return his flowers," stated Warqa.

Her grandmother was shocked and said, "You want to return the flowers?! Are you crazy? Haven't you seen the precious diamond ring in the box?"

"No, I have not looked at it, and I don't want to," Warqa said.

"You must be mad. If you were sane, you wouldn't do such a thing. He is your cousin and your fiance."

"What? What have you said? Who is my fiance?" demanded Warqa.

"Mahir!" said her grandmother.

"Since when? I never agreed to marry him."

Her grandmother said, "You should think carefully before you reject him. He is an excellent person and would be very good for you."

"I have made up my mind not to marry him."

"What is wrong with him?" her grandmother asked angrily.

"He is not a committed person," Warqa said.

"You can guide him to the right path."

"What if he never listens?"

"Then you can mind your own business and leave him. You don't have to share his grave, you know. You will enjoy his great wealth and he alone will suffer in Hell," her grandmother told her.

"Then this would not be a marriage, just a business deal for exploitation-no more, no less," Warqa objected.

"What about his gift?"

"All his gifts, cars, property and other wealth count for nothing, since he lacks religious belief. Give him back his gift and tell him to look for someone else to marry."

"I won't do that," replied Warqa's grandmother, "You can do it yourself if you wish to."

That evening Mahir came alone. Warqa's grandmother welcomed him and tried to speak with him alone before Warqa came in the room. She began by saying, "Thank you so much for the gift you gave Warqa, Mr.Mahir."

"Oh, it is nothing. Warqa is worth much more. I hope the ring fits."

"She is still young," Warqa's grandmother said with a sigh. "She needs to be brought round gradually."

"How is that?"

"She has refused to try on the ring. She says she is tired from the exams."

"She must rest." Mahir agreed. "I only want her agreement. I have chosen a very expensive set of diamonds to match her beauty. I have come to fix a date for the engagement."

Confused, Warqa's grandmother said, "I will get in touch with you later. I shall persuade her to agree."

"I am very surprised. Why does she need to be persuaded? It is a good match. It seems she is childish," Mahir said.

"She is young, but she is also wise and prudent, thank God. She may have a different point of view, but I will make her change her mind."

Suddenly Warqa opened the door and entered the room with the small white box in her hand. Her grandmother was upset and expected a confrontation. Warqa greeted her cousin and sat down in a chair by the door. Mahir stood up to welcome her.

Warqa spoke first, "Thank you for the flowers. They were a nice present from a cousin, but I can't accept this one." She held out the box.

Mahir was stunned and was at a loss for words.

Finally he said, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that we are cousins, nothing else. That is enough."

"But can't I seek a closer relation?" Mahir asked.

"No!"

"Can you tell me why? Have I done anything wrong?"

"Of course not. But it is for our own good."

"How do you know it is good for me?" he then asked.

"Because I cannot be a real wife for you. There is a barrier that cannot be ignored, so let us just remain cousins."

"If you think my wealth is a barrier, be sure that it is not important to me that you are not rich. When you become my wife all my wealth will be yours."

His words annoyed Warqa, but she tried to stay calm. She explained, "You don't understand me. I was not referring to wealth."

"Then is it our social standing? We are both engineers."

"Please let me finish," Warqa said sharply.

"I am sorry, please go on," said Mahir.

"What I mean is that the religious situation is what makes the real difference." She sat silently for a moment. Mahir coughed to hide his confusion. Warqa's grandmother used the opportunity to say, "This is unimportant. He won't make you change your commitment, will you Mr. Mahir?"

Seeing a way out, he quickly said, "Of course, I won't prevent her from performing her religious duties. If this is her reason, there is no question of it."

Warqa smiled bitterly and said, "In short, I would like you to answer a question: How do you view marriage?"

Mahir had not expected such a question and he hesitated and then said, "A happy life together."

"You have not really given your opinion. To you, it is just an end in itself."

He laughed meaninglessly and asked, "How do you view it, then?"

"It is for you to answer!"

Warqa's grandmother interrupted, "Stop this talk. He is your cousin, and that is enough."

Warqa turned to her, saying, "At least you should understand me, even if he won't. Married life is not a business agreement or a social ritual. It is a mutual life course and a uniting of two spirits and their beliefs. Such unity cannot take place if the points of view of both sides are quite

opposed. If we differ ideologically, we can't agree emotionally. This is a serious reason for marriages, which fail. I don't wish to suffer in such a marriage. "

Her grandmother persisted, "You can each have your own way of life."

Warqa said impatiently "That would be a schizophrenic situation. There would be mental disorders in such a life."

"After marriage you may come to understand each other," her grandmother pleaded.

"I don't think so," said Warqa. "That would require a compromise on both sides, and I am not ready to do so. My religion is very important to me, and it should control my future."

Mahir commented, "I don't know what religion has got to do with your future. You are an engineer with or without it. I have my career, though I am not a committed person."

"You misunderstand me again. By the future, I mean the afterlife in the Hereafter. You have no thought of that life, while I am quite concerned about it; more than about my future career, which, however long it may be, will still be a limited one. The other life is everlasting."

Mahir looked pale, as if her words had affected him.

In an attempt to end the dispute, Warqa's grandmother turned to her and said, "Go to your room now. We have plenty of time to settle the matter." Warqa didn't leave the room and her grandmother insisted, "Get up and go. No more childish talk."

Mahir laughed and said, "She is excused. She has had an unusually complicated life. I hope to give her a long and happy life of openness and freedom. Surely she is under

the influence of a bad male or female acquaintance."

Warqa's grandmother understood what he was implying and said angrily, "You should not say such things. Warqa is a good, honest girl and is well-behaved. Warqa, go up to your room."

Warqa was vexed but said nothing. She went upstairs and sat on the edge of her bed, waiting for Mahir to leave.

Her grandmother tried to apologize for Warqa's behaviour, which made Mahir determined to win this stubborn girl who refused all of his wealth. He tried to appear patient and kind, saying, "Don't apologize, I

have my own ways of getting her to agree. You can phone me if there is any progress."

He said good-bye and left; his mind made up that he would either get her or ruin her life by tarnishing her reputation so that no one would marry her.

Chapter 9

A CONSPIRACY

Warqa felt better, since she thought she had put an end to the matter. She felt she had won that round of battle and she was in good spirits the next morning.

Her mood surprised her grandmother, who had expected her to be angry about the previous day's discussion. Warqa was anxious to see Dr. Miyad and tell her the details, but the doctor was busy with an urgent case and Warqa returned home. Her grandmother met her at the door and whispered, "Go to your room and keep quiet."

Surprised, Warqa said, "What is the matter?"

"Sh! go up there quickly and don't come down until I call you."

Warqa went upstairs. She was disturbed, since she did not know what was upsetting her grandmother. She looked at her watch, which seemed to be standing still.

After an hour had passed, Warqa heard the front door close and her grandmother called her. Warqa went quickly downstairs and found her grandmother sad and pale.

Warqa was terrified. "What is wrong, grandma? By God, tell me what has happened!"

"Do you know who was just here?"

"It was Mr. Hamid, the man who took away our land."

"What did he want?"

"He wants his right to the mortgaged house. We have no papers to prove we repaid the money, since all the papers were stolen, as I told you. He said he had been

waiting until you finished college. Now he wants his money, unless..." she left the sentence unfinished.

"Unless what?" asked Warqa.

"Unless you agree to marry his son. Then he would give us back the land and the house."

"What did you tell him?"

"Allah helped me give him the right answer. I told him that you are already engaged so that he would not think about it any more."

"How could you do that?" asked Warqa. "He will find out it is not true."

Her grandmother told her, "Now you must agree to Mahir as soon as possible. In any case, Mahir is much better than the landlord's playboy son."

Warqa moaned as if in pain and did not speak. After a while she said, "I won't marry Mahir. Let Mr. Hamid take everything-I don't want the land or the house. I will sacrifice all for the sake of my religion."

Her grandmother burst into exaggerated cries of despair. She insulted Warqa, using every unkind word she knew. Warqa tried hard to calm her and then she went to her room and lay on her bed, miserable and exhausted.

The next morning, Warqa did not come downstairs as usual. Her grandmother thought she was still sleeping, so she waited for some time before going up to her room to awaken her. She went up to Warqa's bed and called her softly, but she was shocked when she touched Warqa's hand and found it was hot and she saw that Warqa was taking quick, shallow breaths. Warqa opened her eyes and looked at her grandmother, who asked her quickly, "What is wrong Warqa dear?"

"I don't know."

"Shall I call a doctor?"

"Yes please. I don't feel well." Her grandmother did not know who to call, and she phoned Mr. Mahir to ask him to bring a doctor. She reached him at his office and told him, "Oh Mr. Mahir, please come quickly and help Warqa. She is very sick."

"What is the matter with her?" he asked rather indifferently.

"She is sick and needs a doctor."

"Doctors are not in their clinics in the mornings."

"You can find one. Not all of them work in hospitals," Warqa's grandmother persisted.

"I am quite busy with some clients. Wait until the afternoon and if she is still sick, call me."

Distraught, Warqa's grandmother hung up the telephone. She tried some herbal remedies, but nothing helped Warqa. That afternoon, she telephoned Mahir again, but she was told that he had gone out of town on business and would not be back until the next day. She recited some Qur'anic verses and different prayers by Warqa's bedside.

In the evening Warqa's condition worsened, and her grandmother was at a loss as to what to do. She called Mahir's office, but in vain. She did not try to call anyone else, but when she saw how sick her granddaughter was, she cursed herself and said, "I have killed my granddaughter with my own hands! I must do something to save her."

She dialed the number of the hospital and asked to speak with Dr. Miyad. The nurse who had answered the telephone told her that the doctor was asleep, but Warqa's grandmother insisted upon speaking to her. The nurse promised to give the doctor Warqa's phone number and she hung up. The telephone rang almost immediately, and

Warqa's grandmother tearfully told the doctor about Warqa's condition, begging her to come quickly to save her.

Dr. Miyad noted her address and promised to come immediately.

After a short while the doorbell rang. Warqa's grandmother, forgetting all about her hatred, opened the door for Dr. Miyad and welcomed her. She showed the door to Warqa's room and Dr. Miyad expressed grave concern for Warqa's health. "I must have assistance," Dr. Miyad said.

"She is critically ill."

"Where can you find another doctor at this late hour?"

"My brother is in the car outside."

"Oh please ask him in. He may be able to save her," Warqa's grandmother urged.

Dr. Miyad asked her brother to come in. He examined Warqa and diagnosed her sickness. They agreed that she should be taken to the hospital, but Warqa's grandmother was terrified. "Is she that sick? Is she dying? Woe to me, I have killed her!"

The doctor said, "It is vitally important that she be taken to the hospital. Won't you agree?"

"Of course I will," said the grandmother quickly.

An ambulance was requested and it soon came. Dr. Miyad promised to take care of Warqa and so her grandmother remained at home. Dr. Miyad reassured her and said she would stay in touch by phone.

Warqa responded well to treatment but she was still unconscious. Dr. Miyad and her brother were by Warqa's bed when they heard her murmur: "It is not possible that their father is a murderer... Oh, Miyad can't be the daughter of a killer ... please, grandma, make that silly man Mahir go away... let them have the house... how can I refuse her brother, I only saw him twice... I don't want..."

Dr. Miyad looked pale and turned to her brother, "You heard what she said, didn't you?"

"Yes. It seems she had a reason for her refusal."

"What shall we do now?" asked Miyad.

"Let her recover first and we can settle the matter later."

Two days later Warqa was much better and Miyad was in her room when she awoke and looked around in amazement. She saw her friend, but closed her eyes again in disbelief, thinking she was dreaming. Dr. Miyad took her hand and said, "How do you feel now, dear sister?"

Warqa opened her eyes and asked weakly, "Are you really Dr. Miyad, or am I dreaming?"

"Oh no, you are not dreaming. Thank God you are well again."

"Where is my grandmother?"

"She is at home. I told her I'd take her place and stay with you. I will send for her now to come see you."

"How was I brought here?" Warqa asked.

"You are tired now, so rest. I will tell you all about it tomorrow. I will go phone your grandmother now."

"Please don't leave me alone; I am afraid."

"You are getting well. Why are you scared?"

"I am not afraid of sickness," Warqa explained, "I am afraid of people."

"I won't be away for long, just a few minutes."

At that moment the door was opened by her grandmother, who rushed toward her.

Dr. Miyad said, "She is all right and has asked about you." The grandmother kissed her gently and Warqa asked, "How did you get here, grandma?"

"The doctor who was with Miyad the day you became ill brought me."

Dr. Miyad was proud of her brother and said, "My brother, Sinad, is wonderful, isn't he?"

Warqa didn't understand, so she closed her eyes and said nothing.

Chapter 10

THE TRUTH REVEALED

Warqa's grandmother sat near her and Dr. Miyad left the room. She was very happy to see Warqa improving. Warqa's grandmother was at a loss as to how she should feel about Dr. Miyad. She explained to Warqa how she had called Dr. Miyad for help after Mahir had shown no concern. She told her how the brother and sister had worked to save her. Warqa then said, "Now you can see the difference between their behaviour and Mr. Mahir's."

Her grandmother began to say, "In fact, they are good examples of unselfish, kind people. Mahir has shown his true face, but... "

Warqa guessed what she had been about to say, but turned to Almighty Allah for help.

The next morning Dr. Miyad came and was pleased to see Warqa was quite well. The doctor told Warqa's grandmother, "You can take a rest. I will sit by Warqa in the meantime." She agreed, and lay down on the sofa with her face to the wall.

Warqa thanked Dr. Miyad for all she had done and told her, "Twice you have done me a great favour. You helped me with my belief as well as with my health. I don't know how to thank you."

"This is the duty of every sister. Actually I am grateful to your grandmother for calling me."

"Oh sister, she is very happy with you," Warqa said. She then closed her eyes and said nothing.

"You call me sister, but you don't know the details of my life," said Dr. Miyad.

"Is it a special life story then?"

"Yes. It begins years before my brother and I were born."

"Are you twins?"

"Yes, we are, but he was ahead of me in his studies because I was very ill for three years during my childhood. Did you notice the resemblance between him and me?"

"Well, I never thought much about it," said Warqa.

"I thought so," said Dr. Miyad. She continued, "The story is also about my real father, who died in a car accident a month before I was born. My brother and I were born orphans. But our father died two years ago."

Warqa's grandmother turned in order to listen better.

The doctor resumed her story, "My father, Abdul Razzaq, was a poor man, but a virtuous one. My mother married him after having refused to marry a wealthy cousin of hers who was a loose, deviated man. My mother was rich and beautiful. When my father died, she suffered a lot. The rich cousin and his mother were nearby to help, and a few months later his mother persuaded my mother to marry her son. At first she refused, but the young cousin promised to behave well and take care of her small family.

"He expressed his love and compassion until my mother finally married him. Then, when she discovered that he had attached our birth to his name, she became angry and went back to her father's old house. Her husband still did not leave her alone and he eventually took her back to his house. We grew up thinking he was our real father. We were always surprised by his cruelty towards us."

"He was unkind to you?" asked Warqa.

"Yes, he was. He never kept his word to my mother. He squandered all of his wealth and she suffered much. She died a few years ago. When we were old enough, she told us about our father, and even gave us proof of it."

"What kind of proof?"

"Some letters which he had written to her in which he wrote the reason why he gave us his name. She also told us of certain persons who knew the facts. We suffered from his bad reputation until he died two years ago. Then we found, in a private box, an official letter in which he confessed that we were not his own children. He had written the name of our real father. Perhaps he did not want us to inherit the wealth he had made by cheating and stealing. Anyway, his will helped us to regain our true father's name. Now you know, dear Warqa, who our real father is."

"Oh yes! How happy I am to find you!" Warqa exclaimed joyfully.

"Almighty Allah has returned you to me", added Miyad and recited the Qur'anic verse: *Most surely He Who has made the Qur'an binding to you will bring you back to destination...* (al-Qasas: 85)

THE END

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IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE

*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

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