

CHAPTER 1

Three pairs of young eyes peeked through the crack of the slightly ajar study door. They saw Abu Iman sitting there, deep in conversation with an elegantly dressed stranger. “Masha’allah, he looks so sophisticated,” whispered the older girl to the two younger girls as they nodded their heads in agreement. Suddenly, Maryam, one of the younger girls, who was standing on her tiptoes, lost her balance and fell against the door pushing it more open.

The commotion outside stirred Abu Iman, their father, as he excused himself from his guest to investigate the source of this noise in his otherwise peaceful household. By the time he opened the door, all he caught was a glimpse of the retreating backs of his giggling daughters. They were climbing the stairs two at a time, unwilling to create a scene in front of an important guest. He sighed as he returned to sit with his guest.

Meanwhile, the girls, now safely upstairs, went to their elder sister's room and collapsed in whoops of giggles on the large tastefully decorated cushions on the floor.

"Huda, Noor and Maryam! What has come over you?" inquired a young lady who was seated at her desk and doing her homework. Overcoming her mirth, Huda exclaimed, "Oh! Aisha, there's a man in Papa's study! We think he has come to propose for Iman! He is so good looking and elegant. I hope Iman marries him."

"You should not be talking like this, Huda. You know that very well," admonished Aisha, "a young Muslim lady is supposed to be modest in her speech as well as in her behavior." She was well aware that her younger sister had a fanciful imagination. Little did she or any of the other girls, know that Huda's unwitting remark was very close to the actual situation. "I know. I'm sorry!" Huda apologized quickly before her elder sister could say anything further on the matter. She decided to change the subject. "By the way, where is Iman?" she inquired. She was referring, of course, to the eldest and the most respected of Abu Iman's daughters.

Abu Iman and his wife lived in a small town in the United States with their five lovely daughters. At nineteen, Iman was the eldest of the group. Next came Aisha who was two years her junior, and then Huda and Noor. Maryam, the youngest, was barely ten years old. The girls lived in a small Muslim community that they were fortunate to have in their town. They went to the small masjid to pray almost every day, often accompany their parents to various events set up to further their spiritual growth. The girls were raised in a sheltered environment. The Islamic atmosphere at home helped them excel at school. Signs of maturity and judgment had begun to appear on Iman and Aisha, as their parents had happily noticed. In fact, it allowed their mother to work outside the house for a few hours each day. Iman and Aisha often stepped in to help the

younger girls during their parents' absence. It was no surprise that Abu Iman and Ummu Iman were pleased to see well-behaved young ladies at dinner each night. If Iman and Aisha felt the same way they never voiced it. The same could not be said about the youngest. Maryam showed all the signs of being a tomboy and was involved in the boyish pursuits of her indulgent father.

Iman was on her way back home from visiting Asma, a childhood friend. She had no idea what was happening at home. As she drove, she reflected on the conversation she and Asma had. Asma had revealed her fears about how she suspected her husband, Omar, to be enamored with a non-Muslim girl at work. Asma was dismayed at how she and her husband would constantly have long useless arguments just to vent out their feelings against each other, all because of another girl. These revelations did not come as a shock to Iman, as she already did not regard Asma and Omar as a very spiritually inclined couple. Since Islam was not a driving force in their life, they resorted to whatever each thought was right. Often each insisted on his or her viewpoint. Needless to say, such inflexibility led them to mistrust one another. Yet, it was sad for Iman to see two good people suffer so much, while the solution to their misery was so apparent. "If only somehow they could realize this," thought Iman. "Once true faith enters their hearts, they will know how to negotiate their differences," she thought.

"Alhamdulillah, they pray and fast," sighed Iman, "but they have never allowed Islam to enter their life by genuinely seeking guidance from Allah, subhaanahu wa ta'ala, through the Quran and the Sunnah. I am sure that only then, all these differences which seem so weighty now would only be reduced to something paltry and insignificant," reasoned Iman out loud.

CHAPTER 5

Iman came back to the family room and found her sisters gathering up their things in the family room. “Why didn’t someone tell me that Khaled was in the house when I was on the phone?” she inquired from nobody in particular. It was a question that was burning on her lips ever since she found herself caught in that embarrassing situation earlier that evening.

“Well, Iman, he had just sat down the minute before you walked into the room. Besides, he surprised us as well,” Aisha responded.

“Speaking of which, you all shouldn’t have allowed him into the house while Papa is not here. You know we never entertain a male guest when Papa is not around,” Iman reprimanded.

“Iman, how can you tell a guest not to enter the house? It seems so rude!” Huda debated.

“Being a Muslim, he should respect us. He doesn’t realize that he should not be entering our house if a male member of our family is not present. I have a weird feeling that, instead of feeling awkward that our parents were not home, he seemed quite pleased.” Iman informed them, growing a little uneasy.

“Obviously he doesn’t realize that he shouldn’t be entering our house,” Aisha pitched in.

“But he did say, ‘I’m sorry for intruding upon your hospitality?’ Didn’t he?” Maryam said defensively. This fueled Iman’s growing irritation towards Maryam, who she had forgotten about momentarily.

“Subhaanallah! Maryam, how can you defend him? Just because he has been attentive to you doesn’t mean that you should defend somebody who has no Islamic manners. I’m surprised that you let him in.” Iman said.

“Well, nobody else made a big deal about it when he came in? You’re making it sound as if I begged him to come.” Maryam finished.

“Oh,” Maryam uttered as she realized that she was the one who had encouraged Khaled to come in. She was afraid that if she came home by herself, she would get in trouble. She immediately realized that she was being very selfish lately, and it had not gained her any happiness. She was surprised how willingly her other sisters had taken the blame for inviting him in, while they all knew that she was the one who allowed him to enter. “They really love and care for me, and want to protect me. And all I’ve done is been a pain to them,” she thought to herself. She silently pledged that she would strive to be helpful and her normal self again. She knew Iman was about to mention the events of the past few days, so she quickly spoke up. “I know I’ve been behaving badly for the past few days. I don’t know what came over me, but I hope everyone forgives me. I will honestly try not to be like that again.”