

## Chapter 1

On the spacious balcony of a home in the capital of an Islamic country, two young women sat nearby talking. Sumayah, the resident of the house, looks younger than her twenty years. She listens to her visitor with a disapproving look on her face. Fitnah, Sumayah's cousin, has recently returned from a European country, where she and her husband had lived for several years. Having heard of Sumayah's impending marriage, Fitnah hastened to visit her, with evil intentions. She spoke about European life and the advantages of western civilization. She also relates off-color jokes, but Sumayah does not join in her laughter.

Sumayah, a polite young woman, was raised in a religious family. Her future husband, Ahmad, has completed his education and is now managing a successful business. Ahmad and Sumayah are officially engaged, and he visits her home often.

Although Sumayah does not agree with her cousin's way of thinking, she doesn't want to insult her as a guest, who is saying, "The best place for your honeymoon is Europe."

"Europe!" replied Sumayah, "We won't go to any European country. We may visit another Islamic country."

Fitnah laughed and said, "Perhaps you intend to spend your honeymoon performing your pilgrimage in Mecca!"

Sumayah ignored her sarcasm, "No, we have decided to perform our hajj at a later time."

"Why don't you suggest to Ahmad that you visit Paris or London? Can't he afford it?"

"Oh, he can afford it, but neither one of us like the idea of spending our honeymoon in Europe."

Fitnah asked, "Is he afraid to travel by air? Then he can travel by car or by ship. By the way, has he a car?"

"Yes, he has. And he has never been afraid of flying! But in fact, he is a good Muslim and does not want to have his honeymoon in Europe."

Fitnah exclaimed, "Oh, this is terrible! Is he a reactionary?"

"Absolutely not, He is a very enlightened and educated person", Sumayah replied.

"Is he a very religious man?" Fitnah asked.

Sumayah smiled, "Thank God, he is!"

"Oh, what a pity! You do not know what it means for a modern girl to marry a religious man! You don't know of the limits, chains and strict instructions that he will impose upon you."

Sumayah replied, "I am quite sure that you exaggerate. I am a Muslim believer and I know Islam has its own morals and value system."

Fitnah continued, "These so-called morals are nothing other than chains and rules; an abyss in which you will be kept away from society. You are at the threshold of life; don't allow reactionary ideas to disturb your happy future!"

"You are mistaken. There is nothing reactionary in religion. Ahmad is sure to make me happy. He is everything to me and I love him very much."

Fitnah told her, "Yet, you won't be everything to him. You will be just like any other thing in his life."

"Oh, no, I am aware of my status in his heart."

"Well, as long as you are engaged, he will display all his love and passion. But when you live together, you will find out what a Muslim man is really like!"

Losing patience, Sumayah asked, "Am I not a Muslim also?"

"Yes, you are a Muslim girl, but not of Ahmad's type! My point of view is that the woman should have complete freedom to enjoy all of life's pleasures. Ahmad will only control yours, as if you were his slave."

"This is strange," Sumayah commented. "Why do you hate and misrepresent Islam, although you are a Muslim woman? Has Europe corrupted you?"

Fitnah answered, "Oh, no. My affection for you has prompted me to speak frankly. Though I was happy when I heard the news of your engagement, I also felt sorrow, since I wished a better future for you."

"How can you be so sure that I won't have a good life?" Sumayah asked.

Fitnah said, "If your husband is of those few who boast of Islam and its ethics, he will never make you happy."

"What do you mean by 'few'? Can't you see there are millions of believers everywhere?"

"I mean those who have only recently adopted hollow ideals, which they use to dominate woman and control her by imposing limits and barriers on her under the cover of Islam."

"But a Muslim man also has limits", Sumayah replied.

"Well, they are free to do what they like. Hasn't Ahmad been to Europe several times?"

"He is going to Paris soon, as a matter of fact, in order to forward his thesis for his doctorate and to sign some business contracts."

"Then he has the right to go, but you have not! Can't you see? He is free to go wherever he wishes. As for you, Islamic limits hold you back."

"I don't agree with you. Ahmad and I share the same ideas. I am satisfied with Islamic limits."

"I am afraid you will wake up suddenly one day and it will be too late!" Fitnah predicted gloomily.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean to say that marriage won't be successful unless it is founded on progressive norms. A modern girl won't have a good marriage unless she is released from family pressure and is free to choose the man she wants to marry."

Sumayah said, "Family ties, which you call pressure, are for the benefit of the whole family. In any case, I have been free to choose Ahmad."

Fitnah then said, "You will be faithful to him, I'm sure. But men are unlike women. They cheat their wives by various methods. They exploit women by referring to religious instructions, which imprison women in their homes."

"Why do you consider a woman's own home to be a prison?" Sumayah asked.

Fitnah replied, "A woman cannot keep her eyes on her man unless she accompanies him on his trips and parties! A woman who sits in her house and leaves her husband free to enjoy himself cannot have a happy life."

"Oh, you don't know what a wonderful man Ahmad is. I wish you knew him."

Fitnah remained silent for a moment and, trying to sound normal, said, "I have never seen him."

"When you meet him, you will change your ideas about Muslim believers."

Fitnah suddenly stood up and said, "I must leave now. I am going to a party tonight."

Sumayah was surprised by her cousin's abrupt departure. She walked with her to the door and then

returned to her mother, who asked, "Why have you been sitting on the balcony all alone?"

"I was not alone," Sumayah told her, "Fitnah has just left."

"What has she told you? I am sure she speaks about nothing but Europe and western so-called civilization."

"You are quite right, mama!"

"Woe to her! Has not it been enough for her to spoil her own nature? Can she not stop herself from pouring her poisonous words into your ears? She is afraid of talking in my presence; that is why she preferred to sit on the balcony! She is Satan himself."

Sumayah said, "Oh, mama! She is your niece. You shouldn't talk about her like that!"

"I don't like her manners and her deviated behaviour." Sumayah's mother told her. "She has caused her mother's death. My sister never condoned her daughter's bad behavior. Now tell me, what did she say to you?"

"Mother dear, forget it. She never has ill intentions."

"I wish you knew her real character so that you would not be tempted to listen to her."

"Oh mama, take it easy. I never agree with her ideas, but I do not agree with you in calling her a Satan. She is my cousin."

Sumayah went to her own room, trying to forget Fitnah's words. She was sure of Ahmad's love and that he was an excellent person. She knew that her cousin was unhappy, and that all she had gotten out of life was an unemployed husband who was good for nothing. Due to a substantial inheritance, he is free to spend much on his pleasures without the least consideration of Allah's bounties in regard to gratitude and good works. Her cousin thinks of nothing but money. In fact, she lives for the sake of money. Sumayah decided to ask Ahmad about woman's status in Islam and his own viewpoint. She knew that he would no doubt explain everything to her and elaborate on the differences between the roles of men and women.

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