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The Red Alert

When Ahmad returned home, his wife Maryam was still out. He sat down next to his children and joined them in their game. Afterwards, he picked up a book and passed the time reading. Finally at 10 o'clock that evening his wife returned home. She did not even allow Ahmad to greet her, but quickly rushed passed him to her room and took off the mask that transfigured her natural form. She looked less beautiful but more gentle. From her behavior, Ahmad knew that she had something to tell him.

As soon as the children went to bed, she said to her husband, "Oh, Ahmad, you have not asked me about my visiting today."

Ahmad smiled and said, "I hope you have enjoyed yourself."

Maryam said, "…I had a wonderful time! The house and the garden were magnificent, and their table was rich with delicious foods. My friend, Hana, had the most beautiful wig. Dr. Iram's wife wore an expensive suit. It was quite beautiful."

Her husband smiled ironically and asked, "The suit or the Dr.'s wife?"

"Oh, the suit was wonderful! But I was too embarrassed to enjoy the visit," she added. Ahmad silently beseeched Allah to give him patience and said to himself," This is just the beginning; Allah will help me in the end." He did not answer his wife's remarks. She continued, "It seems as if you do not care for me. Am I nothing to you? You do not ask the reason for my uneasiness. You regard me as if I were a stranger."

Maryam seemed truly upset, so her husband said to himself, "I place my affairs before Allah. If I do not ask her the reason, she will cry."

He gently asked her, "Why do you think such a thing? You are my dear wife and the mother of my children. Why are you upset? Were you embarrassed by your clothing?"

"Oh no, although it was not as beautiful as the Dr.'s wife's suit, I can buy a better one in the future. The source of my uneasiness has been in my failing to ask my friends to visit me. It has been a long time

since I last invited them to my home. How would they account for such delay? Surely they will think it is due to some financial hardship, or that you are a miser or ignorant of social formalities. Such ideas hurt me, since I know you are an excellent husband and a good father."

"Thank you for the compliment. Now what exactly do you want?"

Maryam replied, "Today is the fifth of the month. I can fix a day for their visit as long as we can afford to spend some money."

"You talk as if the event is a victorious battle in need of great preparation," Ahmad said. His wife laughed, "No. it is not like that, but it doest cost...."

Ahmad said, "But how can we manage until the end of the month if your party will be expensive? We are already in debt. Now you want to make matters worse." "You can borrow some money from your friends," his wife suggested. "You know I have borrowed from many of them. How can I ask for more?"

"Oh, how miserable I am! I was brought up in a rich family and lived a luxurious life. Now I cannot even afford to invite my friends over for an afternoon. Oh, what a shame! How am I to face them? Can I show myself in society? This means I must isolate myself and give up all of my friends." Maryam started crying, while her husband tried to convince her of his viewpoint. She never listened to him, but said, "Oh, surely I shall suffer from sickness. If I stay two days at home, I shall suffer a nervous breakdown and lose my appetite."

Finally, Ahmad gave in and agreed to his wife's demand. His wife arranged everything for the special day. She asked her sisters to help her arrange the rooms for the occasion. She would have never imagined that the outcome of her party could be the destruction of her family life. On the day of the party, Maryam asked her husband to stay out until a late hour and she sent her children to her mother's house. She got herself ready for her guests, who arrived shortly before sunset. They were all dressed in the latest fashion and with full makeup. The home was soon filled, and gossip and idle speculation dominated the conversation. Each was criticized by the other. One's dress was not to the taste of the other; and this hairdo was not nice as another's. Silly talk and jokes filled the air.

At 8 o'clock, Maryam called her guests to dinner. Suddenly the phone rang and one of the guests was called. As soon as this lady put down the phone, she came to Maryam and apologized for having to leave at once. Her husband had warned of a red alert and she had to reach home before the lights went out. Upon hearing this news, the other guests rushed towards the door. They left without even a good-bye. Maryam emerged from the kitchen to see that her guests had all disappeared. She was shocked and dismayed to see her party come to such an end, especially when she thought about all the trouble she had gone to and the dispute with her husband about the matter. She had hoped to make a good impression on her friends. She sat down and wept bitterly. She wished her husband would come home early, before the red alert sounded. She waited to hear its wailing but there was none.

At 10 o'clock Ahmad came and was surprised to see the house empty. His wife told him the whole story. She feared that he would be angry, but he was quite at ease. He said, "It may be a lie. There is no need for an alert since there are no impending raids. Anyway, I hope you have learned a lesson."

The wife said, "Indeed, I have. I won't undergo such an experience again."

The next day, Maryam's friend phoned and apologized for the previous evening. Her husband had lied to her in order to get her home early since her child had been crying for his mother.

Maryam told her friend that it had been a silly joke, but a good lesson too.

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