

Part 7: 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 fiancé."

"What? What have you said? Who is my fiancé?" 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.

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