

Chapter Two

The days dragged on as we anxiously waited to meet the alim again. We were afraid we might not be able to carry out our plans before matters got worse. Sarah and I read the religious books.

One day before our scheduled meeting with the religious man, I received another threatening letter from Sarah's cousin. It was more strongly worded than the previous one, and I spent the night awake, deep in thought. I seriously feared a conflict.

When I saw Sarah the next morning, I did not tell her about the letter because I didn't want to worry her. She was eager for that day's meeting with the religious instructor. Sarah was in a cheerful mood, and I realized that her previous uneasiness had nothing to do with her cousin. At the appointed hour, we went to our religious instructor's home and found him resting, as he caught cold.

We were going to leave, but he insisted that we stay and that he was ready to continue his lecture— "In the previous meeting, we mentioned the coordination of the universe's parts and its unity," he began. "A human being senses this unity and when he knows that he too, is part of this huge plan, he feels in perfect harmony with all that surrounds him. He then believes that there is a mighty Power ready to help him. This Power has prepared everything for man's benefit. Thus, he does not feel alienated or at loss in the great universe. He comprehends the truth and the reasons for this unity around him."

"Contrary to this feeling, when one does not understand the dimensions of relativity in the universe, where man does not weigh a feather in comparison, he must learn that this great planet, and the sun are at his service; that the sun's heat is designed to ensure his survival on earth, and by this thought, he feels satisfied and proud."

"Had the sun been just a bit nearer to Earth, everything would have burnt up long ago. Had it been a bit further away, extreme cold would have destroyed every living thing. When man learns such scientific facts, he can appreciate the fact of his existence and his role in the world."

"Had night time been longer than it is, the resultant cold would have damaged or destroyed life. This movement of the earth has been calculated to serve man. How does man feel towards the manifestation

of such mighty Power? The oceans cover most of the earth; had they been deeper, then all the carbon dioxide and the oxygen on our planet would have been exhausted by water, eventually leading to lack of air. The depth has been determined to fit man's needs, including his safety.”

"One may think of this planet as being made up of just stones and dirt. But if one studies its dimensions and its geography, one will be amazed at its grandeur with regard to these huge mountains, hills and the many oceans and rivers. One can actually feel the greatness of our Maker by contemplating on the creation. This earth has been designed for human life. Man is in need of a certain amount of oxygen.

When one looks at the gases that surround the globe, one is fascinated by the sky's blue colour in the day and the bright stars at night. Had this layer of gases been thinner, meteors and shooting stars would have burnt through the outer layer of gases and would have fallen to the earth. Such meteors, which travel at speeds of up to 40 miles per second can destroy everything in their path.”

"Even the moon has been placed at a particular distance which affects life on this planet, since the moon causes the high and low ocean tides. Had the distance been less, water would have covered the entire globe. Our air, as well, helps the sun's rays penetrate throughout the universe. Our Creator's wisdom has designed the sun's rays with various extents to fit life. Man is, in fact, a vital part of the universe."

The religious man stopped talking. He seemed tired. Though we knew about these scientific matters, we listened to him attentively as he exposed these facts in relation to God and Divine purpose.

He continued, "Now, you can realize that man lives in harmony with nature. Believing in the unseen is not a mere instinct without a particular aim. In fact, it is important that man learns and investigates in order to reach the truth. Belief in the unseen impels man to learn the secrets of the unseen and to study metaphysics.

This instinct, which helps man to understand unity, also teaches him about his links with the great universe. When he understands that everything is designed for his welfare, is he not bound to be grateful? Such knowledge will show him that everything is created with amazing accurateness. Man then may wonder: Since everything is arranged in order in this huge universe, be it the smallest atom or the largest planet, and all is regulated, can man, the best and most worthy creature be left without a master plan of life? Even an ant or a bee has a regulated life. When man recalls such facts. he asks: What is the best order for human life ?"

Then he asked, "Now, have you read the books I gave you?"

We both answered, "Yes" He then gave us another book and said, "I have explained this aspect of the matter for you. I stated previously that religion should be in harmony with a human being's nature and mind; however, science can also help man to progress. The religion of Islam is in thorough agreement with mental, as well as spiritual progress. There are many facts that can prove this." He started coughing and I felt sorry for him.

I said, "Please rest now. You look tired. We can wait for a few days until you get well again."

He smiled, saying, "But you were in quite a hurry."

I replied, "Yes, but not if it will affect your health!"

He said, "But I don't know how long it will take me to get well again."

I told him, "In two or three days, I will call to ask about your health"

He said, "Then we shall decide at that time when your next visit will be. I hope you will finish this book in the meantime." He gave us another book about Islam

The next day I returned home early and Sarah visited me with some women friends. I started reading the religious book after I finished my studies. It was an interesting book and I recorded some facts in my tape recorder. At about 10 p.m., the doorbell rang. I did not expect any visitors, and I wondered who it could be. I was annoyed, but thought it might be an old friend.

Carrying my book and recorder I went to open the door. I wanted to show the visitor that I was quite busy. When I opened it, I saw a young girl standing surprised at seeing me and said, "Oh, I am sorry. I have made a mistake again." I asked her, "Who are you looking for?"

She replied, "Oh, I am a stranger in this city and I was given this address, but I have knocked on all the doors here and yours is the last one. I think I have been given a wrong address. Oh, what shall I do?" I said, "Let me see the address."

"It is this street and the house is nearby." She started crying and asked, "Where shall I go? Am I to spend the night in the street?"

I saw that she was young and pretty. I feared she might fall into the clutches of some wicked person, yet I found it difficult to invite her into my home. I hesitated for a while then said, "Look, I live alone in this house. I can let you spend the night and I will find somewhere else to sleep." She calmed down and said, "Where will you go?"

I said, "Never mind, I can manage." She said, "Oh, no please, I don't want to trouble you." I stepped outside the door and asked her to enter. I told her that I was leaving the house and that she could stay until morning. At that moment I saw a sudden flash of light, but could not tell its source. I looked around and asked her, "Did you notice that sudden light?"

"Yes, perhaps it is from a car's headlights," she replied. Then she said, "But I am afraid I cannot sleep alone in the house."

I said, "What do you suggest then?" She said, "I suggest you sleep in your bedroom and I sleep in the living room."

I said, "No, you can use my bedroom and I will sleep in the living room."

She said, "Thank you so much."

She entered and I went to sleep in the living room that night. Just then I realized that my small recorder was still on. The tape had finished, and I left it in its place as I was quite sleepy. I was worried about the telephone, which was in my bedroom. What if someone calls? Then I dismissed the thought, since it was nearly midnight. At seven a.m. I woke up and saw the girl waiting for me at the bedroom door. She told me, "Thank you very much for your hospitality, but please don't tell anyone about my stay in your house."

I said, "How can I tell anyone? I don't even know your name."

Oh, yes, I am Maryam," she said. I replied indifferently, "Happy to meet you."

She left and I returned to my bedroom. I saw cigarette butts lying on the table and noticed that Sarah's picture was no longer in its place. I said to myself, 'surely this girl knew I did not care for her.' I wondered how freely the girl had behaved in a stranger's house! I changed my clothes and left for the college. There, I saw Sarah walking with some classmates, so I went directly up to her and wished her a good morning, as usual. She answered me in cold tone and went on chatting with the others, as if I was not there.

"What's wrong?", I implored. She replied, "Oh, nothing."

I asked her, "Have you spent the night reading? You look tired."

She gave me a long sad look and then said, "What about you, have you spent it reading?"

I had nearly forgotten everything about the previous night. I said, "Oh, no, I slept well."

She gave me a bitter smile and said, "Surely it was a comfortable night."

I was about to tell her about the strange visitor, but I remembered my promise to the girl not to tell anyone about her. I hesitated, then said, "Oh, no, it wasn't at all."

She looked at me sadly and said, "I hope you will enjoy your future sleep." Then she turned away and left me standing there alone. I tried to see Sarah that afternoon, but she avoided me. The next day I looked for her at the college but I could not find her. I phoned the boarding house, but they told me she was busy. I went to see her at her home, but she wouldn't come out. I returned home feeling quite miserable and I couldn't sleep that night. The next morning, I hurried to the college to see Sarah, but when she saw me she turned and walked away. I asked her, "Sarah, are you angry?"

"Yes!" she said angrily. Shocked and dismayed, I sat on a bench as she walked away without waiting for me to ask her the reason for her anger. I felt like crying and had to return home since I could not pay attention to my lessons that day. I had no idea why she was angry. The incident concerning Maryam came to my mind, but I brushed it aside, since no one knew about it. I decided to tell Sarah about that girl.

The next day I went early to the college, but Sarah did not come. I was at a loss as to what to do. Walking aimlessly through the streets, I remembered the religious alim and decided to visit him to ask about his health. I was in need of his help. A young child answered my knock, and I asked about the alim. He told me he was well and would receive me. I felt as if I were drowning, without any hope of

being saved, and then suddenly a bright light shone, giving me hope. The child looked at me and asked, "Why haven't you come together? Sarah was here earlier today."

I was surprised to learn that she visited him. "She did not enter, she just asked about my father's health and left," the boy said.

I saw that the alim looked much healthier. We talked about different matters. I was at ease and wished that I could tell him of my trouble but I felt shy. I thought he would talk about Sarah, but he didn't. I asked when our next meeting would be, and he looked surprised, then said,

"Tomorrow afternoon at 4 o'clock." I thanked him and left directly to phone Sarah and tell her of the date, but there was no answer. I felt hopeless until I recalled the alim's words of the power and strength of faith. I thought, 'I have a God to worship and to whom I turn to in times of trouble.' Then I remembered that I hadn't finished the book about religion.

I tried to read, but Sarah dominated my thoughts, and I could not understand a word. I closed the book and wrote a few words in the hope that I could give the letter to Sarah the next morning. 'Oh dear Sarah,' the letter said. 'How I wish all the world be against me except you! After writing the note, I felt better. I thought that everything would be all right once we resumed communication. I got up early the next morning and gave the letter to a friend of Sarah to pass it on to her, but she refused to take it. I thought that she must have had a good reason for such behaviour, thus I was not angry with her.

I spent the day in the college and at the appointed hour, I went to the alim's house and saw Sarah at the door. I walked up and greeted her, but she answered indifferently. I noticed that she looked pale; as if she hadn't slept the previous night.

I asked her "Is it really you?"

She did not reply and I continued, "It is good that we are both attracted to the alim. It means we are actually united."

She said, "Though we both want to continue our studies, it may not mean we are united."

I said, "Please Sarah, be kind to me! You know I cannot live without you. You are my whole life. Why are you treating me in this way? You know your own feelings."

"Whatever I know makes no difference!" she replied.

I said, "But why my dear Sarah? I cannot understand your anger." she was silent then said, "You don't want to understand."

I said, "Oh, no, I really do. I am ready to listen to whatever you say."

"In any case, it is the time for our meeting", she replied. She knocked on the door and we both entered.