

Chapter 4

A week passed by and Sumayah was about to forget everything her cousin Fitnah had said. She was quite happy and a bit anxious about her fiancé's trip. One day, as Sumayah stood waiting for a bus to go to her tailor, her cousin pulled up, stopped her car and offered her a ride. She got in and sat next to her cousin, who usually drove her own car.

Fitnah said, "I thought you said Ahmad has a car!"

"Yes, he has," Sumayah replied, "He is out of town on some business."

"One day I will come to know him, though I do somehow fear him," Fitnah said.

"You are mistaken. He is a kind and polite person."

"But you say he is strict."

Sumayah protested, "No, I never said that. He is very reasonable."

Fitnah told her cousin, "Perhaps to you he seems to be like that. He has managed to make you agree with all of his ideas."

"I do not agree with you! He never imposes his beliefs on me, but I do share these beliefs with him."

"Then you are truly happy?"

"We are", Sumayah stated.

Fitnah drove in silence for a moment and then said, "By the way, are you ever going to learn how to drive?"

"No, it's not necessary. Ahmad can take me anywhere I wish to go."

"Of course!" Fitnah exclaimed. "He won't allow you to drive a car. This is a good way for him to know where you go. As for you, you cannot follow him, since you are a Muslim believer."

Sumayah asked, "Why should I follow him? Do you think I should sit next to him at his office? I'm not suspicious!"

"What about his parties and trips?"

"Women have their own parties and meetings." Sumayah answered. "In any case, Ahmad does not attend parties of either sexes or night clubs."

Fitnah said, "You are being misled. All men are of one of two categories: some are nice and peaceful. They share all social activities with their wives. On the other hand, some are strict and prone to exploit their simple-minded wives and keep them at home."

Sumayah disagreed, "Well, I think a good man is a man who shares his ideals and beliefs with his wife."

"What a strange idea!" her cousin retorted.

"It is not. I have always believed this."

Fitnah continued, "Well, this was your idea when you were a child. Now that you are at the threshold of adulthood, you should have new ideas."

"No, I do not agree with your viewpoint."

"I am quite surprised at your behavior. I do not know how to keep you from destroying your future with such reactionary beliefs. You are an educated girl, yet you stick to these limits on the pretext of being a Muslim. We are all Muslims. Do you think these millions are wrong and only Ahmad is right? Think of yourself. By giving in to Ahmad, you are going to lose much."

Sumayah told her, "My submission is to Allah only. I have my own belief and I am quite happy with Ahmad and my future."

Fitnah asked her cousin, "Can you really be satisfied with this isolated, worthless life?"

Sumayah replied, "It is neither isolated nor worthless! It is what I long for and it is filled with pleasures!"

Fitnah argued, "You still don't know what real pleasure is. You are unaware of life, although you are over twenty years old. Ahmad has managed to mislead you."

"I am quite aware of life and of my right course in it. Anyway, I have never been interested in this corrupted social life of yours. My own girlfriends are all committed Muslims. I am neither ignorant, nor in need of your advice."

"Oh, I am very sorry. I didn't mean to anger you. I do not know why you are upset."

"I am not angry. But I do not like your words!"

Fitnah pretended to feel hurt, "I have alienated you. I feel like I am your older sister, and I am very concerned about your future. I am sure if I introduce you to my friends you will like them all and have great times. Now I have lost all hope. I have spoken frankly to you, and I apologize for this frankness."

Sumayah didn't want her cousin to be hurt, so she said, "That's okay. Please stop. The tailor's shop is right here."

"Sumayah, do you want me to wait for you?"

"No, thank you. I can manage by myself", she replied.

"How can I let you return by bus? I'll pick you here in an hour", Fitnah told her.

Sumayah didn't answer her. She just got out of the car, thanked her cousin for the ride and waved goodbye.

Sumayah left the shop when her work was finished, without waiting for her cousin.

That afternoon, Fitnah visited her to apologize for being unable to take her back.

Sumayah told her that she didn't wait for her. Then Fitnah told her cousin about the party of the previous night and how the singers sang until daybreak. She spoke about films and western film stars, and mentioned the hunting parties that she often attended with her friends. She did not forget to also talk about swimming and the beautiful swimming pools she frequented.

Finally Sumayah asked, "What about your husband? Why don't you mention him? Has he no place in your heart?"

Fitnah was vexed, but tried to sound calm. She thought the question was a challenge. Her husband's personality is the Achille's heel of her life.

She forced a smile and said, "I am an independent wife. My life is not mixed up with his. I accompany him only to special parties. We both believe in our rights to live free."

"How strange it sounds to me!" Sumayah remarked. "You always say that a woman should follow her husband anywhere he goes. Now you say you are free and have the right to do as you like."

Fitnah told her, "You misunderstand me. I mean to say that I accompany him on some occasions, but I do not allow him to follow me anywhere I go. I am sure of myself, but I doubt my husband. A smart woman should never believe her husband and should never allow him to play his own way."

"Do you love your husband?"

Fitnah hesitated and said, "Of course I do. He is a wonderful man. I will introduce him to you. We may visit you soon."

Sumayah shook her head, "I am sorry, but I won't meet him unless Ahmad is present."

"Oh, Ahmad again! I see he is an obstacle in your way."

Sumayah said, "Please be careful with what you say. He is to be my husband and I love him. I won't allow you to undermine his character."

"Had I been here before your engagement, I would have prevented it" Fitnah declared.

Surprised, Sumayah said, "You don't have the right to deprive me of a happy life!"

Fitnah told her, "You are being silly. How could you agree to such an engagement without knowing him first?"

"It makes no difference; I came to know him soon after our engagement. I am neither silly nor was he imposed on me. I have free will and I am sure I won't regret my choice in the future. You believe a couple should enjoy close friendship before engagement. Yet a boy or a girl can deceive each other. Things usually are uncovered in the long run during marriage."

"You are wrong. Society does not consider matters as you do. You are the only one with such old-fashioned ideas," Fitnah said.

"By society, you mean your own friends. As for me, I do not believe you. There are many like me."

"I have not seen any of them", her cousin retorted.

Sumayah continued, "Of course you cannot see things my way. Your way of living has blinded you and you won't believe what you see or hear! Just like those who live in utter darkness."

Fitnah said sarcastically, "Go on! I enjoy your fanatic ideas. You lack nothing but a sanctuary, where you can pray and recite sermons day and night!"

"You are wrong. It makes no difference to me, whatever you say!"

"What a pity! you just repeat the words of ancient times. How quickly you have lost your liveliness. I feel sorry for you. How often I have told Hamid that you are a very beautiful girl. He is eager to meet you. Alas! You speak of nothing but advice and wise sayings."

Sumayah disagreed, "I speak of life without its false, decorative mask."

Fitnah then said, "Ahmad is clever to have taught you all this."

"Don't talk about him like that. I wish you knew him so you could know his real nature."

At these words, Fitnah became pale and said weakly, "Of course, one day I will meet him, but not now."

"Why not? I am sure that upon seeing him you will change your mind and you will admire him very

much."

"I do not like men of his type, whoever it might be."

Sumayah pointed to a photograph on a table and said, "Here is his picture."

Fitnah did not want to look, for fear that her feelings would betray her. She no longer loved him. Her love had changed into hatred and devilish intention. She avoided looking at the picture.

"Please look at him. Can such a man deserve your unjust attacks?"

Fitnah had no other choice but to look at the photograph. She turned her head quickly, saying, "Perhaps I have seen him once or twice at night clubs."

Sumayah angrily said, "I do not believe you, Fitnah. I love and respect Ahmad. I am proud of him."

"Being a wife myself, I do appreciate a happy marriage. I hope you will have everlasting happiness."

After an awkward moment of silence, Fitnah left and Sumayah joined her parents in having dinner. She felt uneasy and longed for Ahmad's imminent return. She wished Fitnah was not her cousin, in which case she would treat her quite differently. She wished she could reform her cousin, but she was at a loss as to how to do so.

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