

Chapter 7

Three weeks later, speaking over the telephone, Fitnah told her cousin, "I have missed you, Sumayah. Are we not cousins? Why haven't you called?"

Sumayah replied, "I am sorry. I have been busy with my fiancé, who is about to leave. In any case, I hope you are well."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. I'll try to visit you soon. Why not now?" Fitnah asked.

Sumayah replied, "Oh, no. I cannot."

"Then I will come to see you this afternoon."

When Fitnah arrived, Sumayah greeted her warmly and apologized for not visiting her.

Fitnah began talking about her life, "I have mentioned you to my husband, He is anxious to meet you. I also told him about Ahmad. He could not believe his ears. He wondered if such men still existed in this modern age. I also told him you are happy with your future husband."

Sumayah remained silent. She felt that it was better not to discuss personal matters with her cousin.

"Does Ahmad allow you to attend parties?" her cousin asked.

"Yes, of course. But only decent ones."

"Then will you come to my birthday party next month?"

Sumayah replied, "Yes, with pleasure."

"You will see scores of men round you." Sumayah became angry,

"Oh, then I won't come. I had forgotten that you invite both sexes. You want to make a show of me. How dare you say such a thing?"

"I never meant that, I just want you to stop sanctuary. I feel sorry for you and I want you to have a good

time!"

"I am quite happy, so don't take the trouble", Sumayah answered.

Fitnah remarked, "Strange! Are you really happy to remain within these four walls?"

Sumayah told her cousin, "I am happy whether I go out or stay home."

Fitnah argued, "Your freedom is limited. What is this scarf around your head and neck? What is this black loose coat that hides your beautiful figure? You look like a shapeless sack. It is a crime that you wear old women's clothes. Why should Ahmad wear the latest fashion while you are deprived of that pleasure? It is a real injustice and a crime that a modern girl like you should obey a man; any man. What kind of a religion is it that makes a woman subservient to a man?"

Sumayah disagreed, "Islam does not make a man exploit a woman. This is a groundless claim. Muslim women, in fact, have privileges that no other women in other religions have. Muslim women's rights are protected in Islam."

"What are these privileges? Are they nothing more than cooking, cleaning and serving a husband and kids?" Fitnah asked.

"Islam does not impose these forms of work on a woman, but Islamic concepts do illustrate the benefits and blessings of caring for her husband and children. She has the choice of doing these services. She is never forced to do them. As for *hijab*, it is a decent dress that can protect a woman from devilish desires. I am proud to observe my *hijab* and I will always stick to it. Anyway you should admit that I am much happier than you are,"

Sumayah concluded.

"Well, I don't mean you only. Perhaps Ahmad has made you close your eyes to reality. I am against any ideas which are reactionary and which control the future of young girls. It is like destroying their best years of life."

"What you brand reactionary is a concept concerning social reform, with which women acquire a respectable status. In fact, nakedness is actually a reactionary idea, since it moves woman backward, back to the Age of Ignorance."

Fitnah replied, "You are misled. You have merely learnt a few words and phrases from Ahmad. If you think carefully, you will realize the truth. This is a modern age and modern society is all around us."

Sumayah protested, "I don't agree with you at all. I have great faith in Islam. I don't repeat Ahmad's words, but Islamic norms and ethics."

Fitnah realized it was useless to continue. She talked of other things and soon left her cousin. Sumayah

decided to tell her fiancé about their disagreement.

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