

Camelia and Raheem

CHAPTER-PLAY 1: The Road to Mecca

In the desert, a caravan of pilgrims crosses the Sahara. An Englishwoman of a certain age, white haired, chisels images of living creatures out of the desert rock. Sea stars and sea horses come out of her hands, driven out of the stone by earthly tools. She has seen the men with turbans cross along the path and she now smiles at them, lifting an arm above her eyes, shading the rays of light.

One pilgrim man remarks her. He looks agitated. He turned his back in disgust and spits under his right shoe. He speaks to one of his brothers of faith who accompanies him, a man also of a certain age. The lady continues to smile a few yards away. Alif declares:

_ Another foreigner taking over our land with statues! And here of all places, a few miles from Mecca!

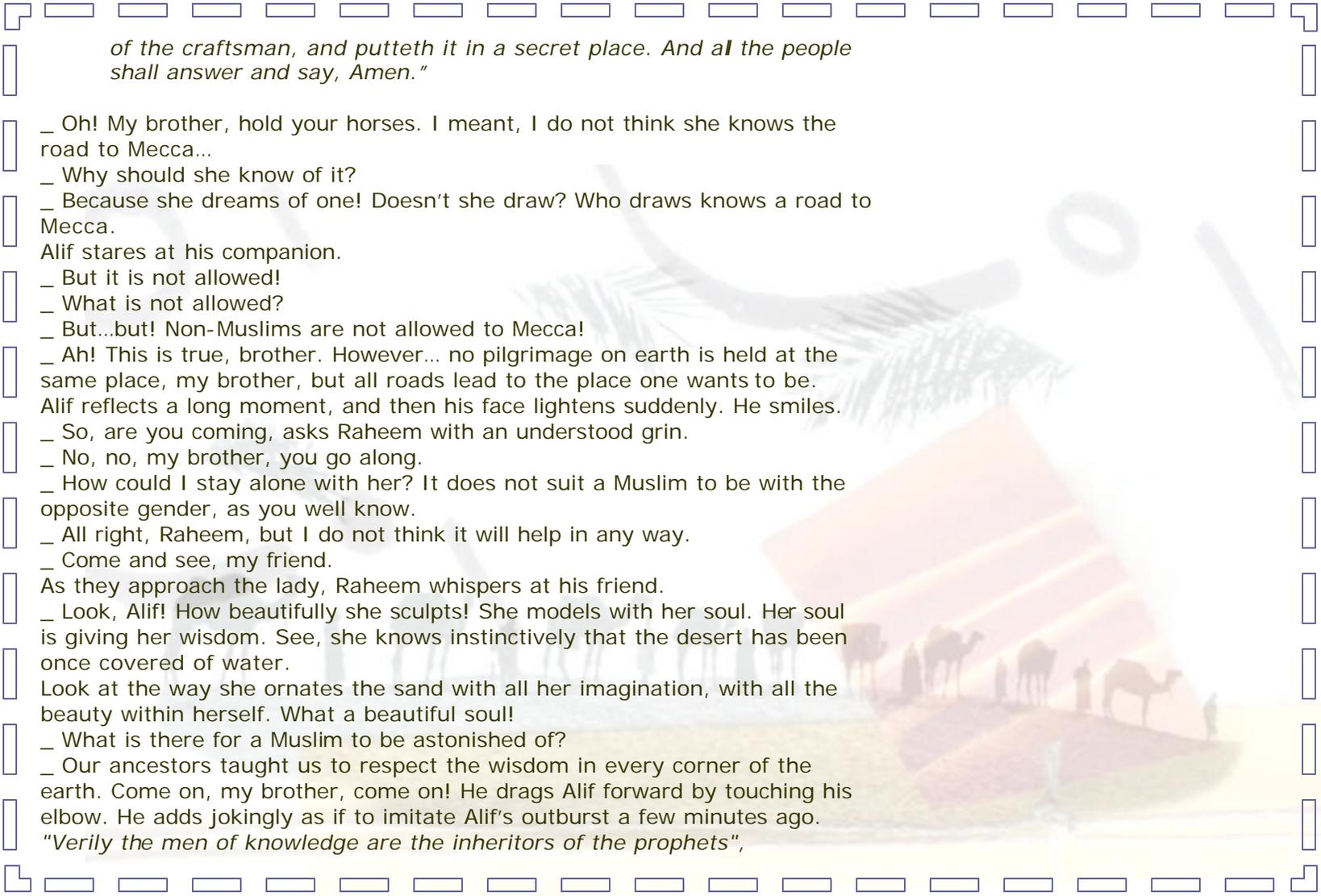
_ I don't believe she knows... says Raheem thoughtful, looking at the lady.

_ However, it is in her Bible. He shrugs. Remember?

Leviticus 26: 1: "Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God."

Deuteronomy 5:8: "Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth".

Deuteronomy 27:15: "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands



of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen."

_ Oh! My brother, hold your horses. I meant, I do not think she knows the road to Mecca...

_ Why should she know of it?

_ Because she dreams of one! Doesn't she draw? Who draws knows a road to Mecca.

Alif stares at his companion.

_ But it is not allowed!

_ What is not allowed?

_ But...but! Non-Muslims are not allowed to Mecca!

_ Ah! This is true, brother. However... no pilgrimage on earth is held at the same place, my brother, but all roads lead to the place one wants to be.

Alif reflects a long moment, and then his face lightens suddenly. He smiles.

_ So, are you coming, asks Raheem with an understood grin.

_ No, no, my brother, you go along.

_ How could I stay alone with her? It does not suit a Muslim to be with the opposite gender, as you well know.

_ All right, Raheem, but I do not think it will help in any way.

_ Come and see, my friend.

As they approach the lady, Raheem whispers at his friend.

_ Look, Alif! How beautifully she sculpts! She models with her soul. Her soul is giving her wisdom. See, she knows instinctively that the desert has been once covered of water.

Look at the way she ornatens the sand with all her imagination, with all the beauty within herself. What a beautiful soul!

_ What is there for a Muslim to be astonished of?

_ Our ancestors taught us to respect the wisdom in every corner of the earth. Come on, my brother, come on! He drags Alif forward by touching his elbow. He adds jokingly as if to imitate Alif's outburst a few minutes ago.

"Verily the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets",

"Knowledge before speech and action". Book of Knowledge, Sahih Bukhari

Vol: 1 Ch 11. Alif smiles back and adds,

_ "Are those who know equal with those who do not know? But only men of understanding will pay heed." [Al-Qur'an 39:9]

However, we must tend to our own affairs, Raheem. We must go to the market and sell our provisions before entering Mecca.

- O, Alif! `Ali said to Kāmil: "O Kāmil, knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge protects you while you have to protect your wealth. Knowledge is a judge, while wealth has to be judged on. Wealth decreases when it is expended, while knowledge purifies when it is given."

_ Alif shrugs his shoulders and complies with another smile. They approach the English woman.

_ Peace be upon you, lady!

She smiles gracefully at them, then declares,

- Salam Alaikum, greetings, gentlemen.

_ The same upon you, says Alif briskly.

_ And the same upon you, lady, declares Raheem gently while taking his time.

He continues, showing the statues with an outstretched hand.

_ Remarkable creations...

_ Really?

_ Yes.

_ I have found few amateurs of three Dimensional representations in your country, sir.

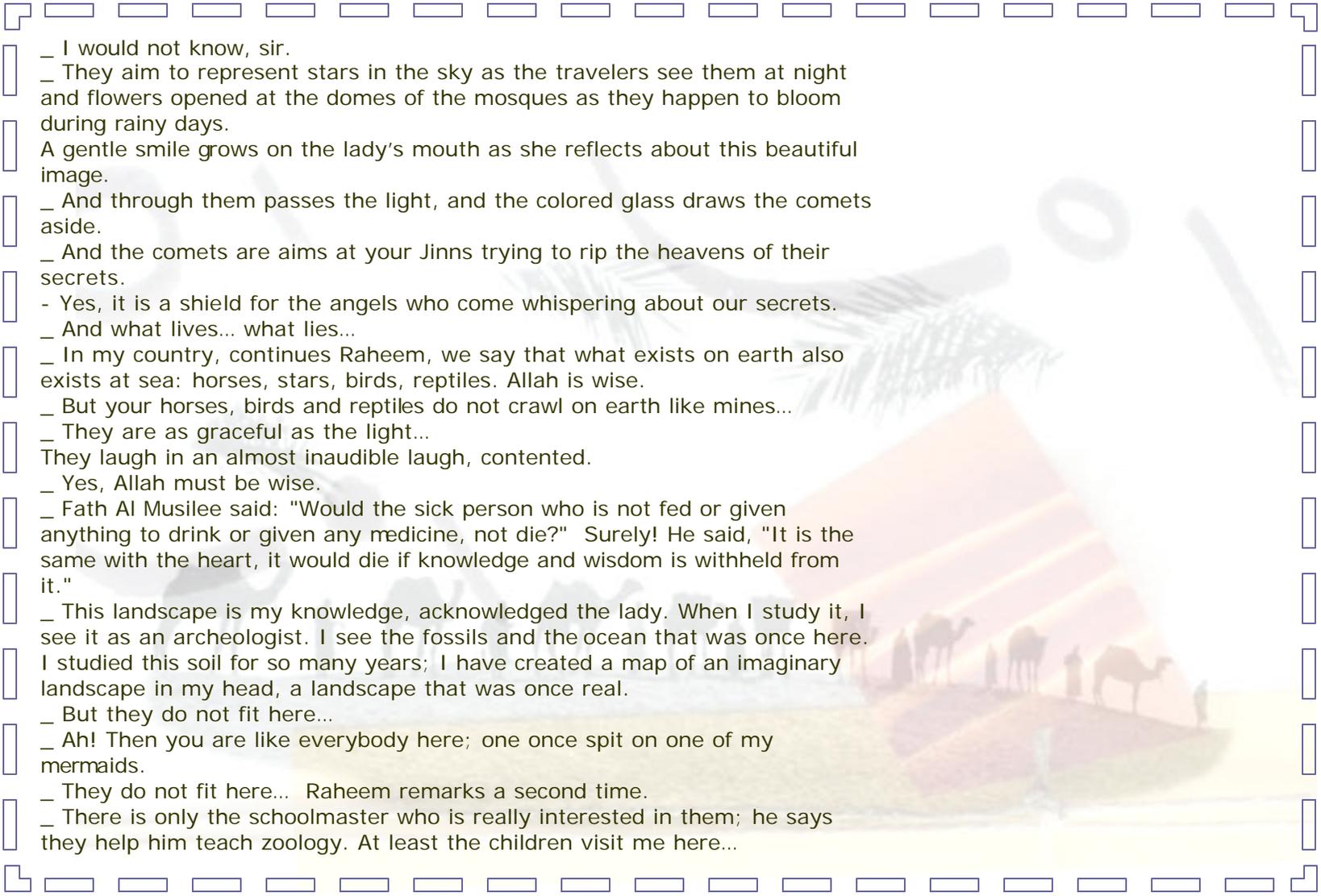
_ Assuredly, reassured Raheem, we have the taste for our own art.

_ Most Arabs like just geometry, I noticed.

_ Of course.

_ They think there isn't anything as impressive as triangles and circles and colored tiles and mosaics. They tolerate my maritime garden only because they cannot rid of me, she confesses whole-heartedly.

- Yes, lady, but the circles and the colors, what are they?



_ I would not know, sir.

_ They aim to represent stars in the sky as the travelers see them at night and flowers opened at the domes of the mosques as they happen to bloom during rainy days.

A gentle smile grows on the lady's mouth as she reflects about this beautiful image.

_ And through them passes the light, and the colored glass draws the comets aside.

_ And the comets are aims at your Jinns trying to rip the heavens of their secrets.

- Yes, it is a shield for the angels who come whispering about our secrets.

_ And what lives... what lies...

_ In my country, continues Raheem, we say that what exists on earth also exists at sea: horses, stars, birds, reptiles. Allah is wise.

_ But your horses, birds and reptiles do not crawl on earth like mines...

_ They are as graceful as the light...

They laugh in an almost inaudible laugh, contented.

_ Yes, Allah must be wise.

_ Fath Al Musilee said: "Would the sick person who is not fed or given anything to drink or given any medicine, not die?" Surely! He said, "It is the same with the heart, it would die if knowledge and wisdom is withheld from it."

_ This landscape is my knowledge, acknowledged the lady. When I study it, I see it as an archeologist. I see the fossils and the ocean that was once here.

I studied this soil for so many years; I have created a map of an imaginary landscape in my head, a landscape that was once real.

_ But they do not fit here...

_ Ah! Then you are like everybody here; one once spit on one of my mermaids.

_ They do not fit here... Raheem remarks a second time.

_ There is only the schoolmaster who is really interested in them; he says they help him teach zoology. At least the children visit me here...



_ It is that they do not fit.... Like this, the way they are.

The lady continues, oblivious of Raheem who rubs his chin thoughtfully.

_ And here are all my heart cuts in little pieces of rocks for them to see. But, they do not see...

Raheem frowns in deep mediation. He stares at the lady and slowly explains:

_ It is not what you sculpt that is offensive, lady, it is the way you sculpt it.

_ What on earth do you mean? Exclaimed the lady puzzled.

_ See, our flora and fauna, even our cosmos is represented to us by the means of geometry. You do not see it but WE see it. Here, YOU see something we do not see.

The lady looks intrigued.

_ Try to erase the faces and rub the eyes.

She considers, looking at her garden.

Raheem continues as if for himself.

_ The expression is not so much in the faces than in the way the body holds itself up.

Hands speak more to the Muslims than the face. Shapes have more meanings. Here, in the Sahara, people hide their faces, whether man or woman. See, the desert is harsh. They have learned to recognize their brothers and sisters by the way they drape their garbs around themselves. It is unique!

He looks the lady straight in the eyes.

Nobody expects to see the face of the stranger, but everybody can tell if the stranger is hungry or sleepy just at the way he picks up his veils.

The English lady looks at Raheem strangely, her eyes shining with interest.

_ Would have I thought of that? She declares.

She reaches for a translucent veil and drapes it around her mermaid.

_You mean like this?

Raheem nods assent.

She suddenly reaches for a book of photographs and open at it the last page.

The photograph shows the image of a man draped under a cloak; only his hands are visible; his posture revealing the agony of a population martyred.

_ Like this?

Raheem nods again, silently.

She picks up her tools and begins by defacing her statues and draping veils around them.

Both Alif and Raheem sit down, patiently waiting for her to finish.

Soon, a horde of pilgrims approaches to see what she is doing. They smile back at her. She brightens, comprehending. They both comprehend each other now.

_ See, remarks Raheem, addressing the lady discreetly, my people now see your people of stone as truly spiritual. They might even see them as Muslims.

_ O, jolly! She remarks happily.

_ See, your churches have been transformed into museums and are yet not true places of worship. People go to cathedrals to visit, not to meditate while they come in our mosques to worship and find peace. Your statues distract them; our geometry elevates them...

Both men leave the scene, waving hands at her. Curious people now begin talking to her.

Alif suddenly comes to stand in front of his friend, stopping him. He puts a hand on Raheem's wrist.

He hesitates, then asks as if as an after thought:

_ Do you think she found her way to Mecca?

_ Probably. She is learning the way.

_ That's "dawah", isn't it?

_ All roads lead to where one wants to be...

Raheem puts his hand on his friends' hand, reassuringly.

They look back at the small group that gathered around the lady.

_ Ameen.

_ Ameen.