

A Family Saga  
across Ethnicity, Place,  
and Religion

REPLENISHING  
*the*  
SEA  
*of*  
GALILEE

*A Novel*

WAGIH ABU-RISH



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First Edition

*In memory of my father, Abu Said Abu-Rish, 1913–2005*  
*Time magazine correspondent, 1950–1985*



## MAIN CHARACTERS AND PLACES

**KAREEM DINAR**—first generation

**AMINA**—Kareem's wife

**RASHEED DINAR**—second generation, Kareem's son

**RASHEEDA DINAR**—second generation, Rasheed's twin sister

**FATHER FEDERICO**—Rasheed's high school teacher

**AMERICAN COLONY HOTEL**—a hotel in Jerusalem

**NATALIA**—member of the socialist kibbutz Shivayon

**ALBINA AND ADRIANA**—Natalia's best friends at the kibbutz

**CHEREV**—Right-wing kibbutz

**DAVID ALEXANDER**—British intelligence captain

**SEAN O'DOWD**—*Daily Mail* bureau chief

**ST. GEORGES HOTEL**—hotel in Beirut

**OMAR**—third generation, Rasheed and Natalia's son

**GISELLE ABIZAID**—correspondent, Agence France-Presse

**IBRAHIM ALVAREZ**—Spanish tourist to Beirut

**CHRISTINA ALVAREZ**—Ibrahim's daughter

**HANIBAKE**—assumed last name for Omar

**JANICE YOUNG**—Baylor medical student

**SAMI SANDOOK**—Omar's best friend

**DR. KISHKAIN**—chief of neurology at Baylor

# THE PERVERSION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

*If human beings understood the essence of their own religions,  
there would have been no wars,  
no concentration camps,  
no Third Reich,  
no Imperial Japan,  
and no al-Qaida or ISIS.*





## PROLOGUE

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1920

*Beit Azar, Palestine*

Kareem was the most eligible bachelor in the village. At thirty-one and owning two successful inns and a food commodity wholesale business, he was envied and respected. He rarely socialized in the village, which was located only a few miles from Jerusalem. Most of his friends were other successful young males working in the tourism industry.

The two businesses took all his time. His favorite pastime involved having a drink or two at the American Colony Hotel. Everyone knew him there, but he mostly kept to himself except to speak to the barmen and occasionally to Anna, the owner of the hotel.

He knew Anna well. She always prodded him to get married. He in turn agreed with her, for the hundredth time. Anna had mentioned to him the names of half a dozen eligible young women. He aspired to marry from Jerusalem rather than from his own village, yet he never applied himself to accomplish that.

One morning, after he kissed the hand of his mother, Sara, Kareem headed downhill to his Aunt Hameeda's house, which was kitty-corner from his and his mother's houses. He noticed a young and most beautiful woman coming downhill behind him, heading in the same direction. He

hid behind the front column of his aunt's house to peek at her. The young woman knocked, and his mother opened the door and greeted her warmly.

Kareem headed back to see who that beautiful woman was. He went up the alley to the far window and gazed downward. He could see the woman taking off her scarf, relaxing, and then going into the kitchen, where she fixed Turkish coffee and then served Sara and herself.

Kareem knew then that she was close to his mother, yet he had never seen her. He left to see his aunt, downhill. He described the young woman to her. Hameeda had no trouble guessing who she was.

"She is Amina, the judge's daughter. Forget about her. She has already turned down five contenders; one was a physician and another a bank manager. You will be wasting your time. You know her father. He is a supreme court judge and a sheikh of sheikhs."

When Kareem mentioned that Amina had not been wearing her headdress, Hameeda got mad. She scolded him for peeking at her through the window and told him that he was behaving immaturely.

"I hope nobody has seen you. It would be a scandal. You looked at her, with her scarf off, while visiting your own mother! What will people say? They may say you arranged all of this with your mother's knowledge. No, no, this is not good. I have to speak to Sara."

Kareem left for work. Hameeda waited for Amina to leave and headed toward Sara's, twenty yards away. Hameeda told her the story. After lamenting the unfortunate affair, they decided to create a cover in case someone may have observed Kareem doing the unthinkable—sneaking to watch the one who was nicknamed by the females of the village as the Princess of Beit Azar.

Hameeda and Sara decided to ask for Amina's hand. They explained to Kareem that the whole thing was a ruse since they felt the judge would surely turn them down. They wanted to cover up his indiscretion, just in case he was seen by others sneaking a peak at a young lady without her headdress. Kareem, feeling that he had done something he should have known to be indiscreet, reluctantly accepted.

Hameeda and Sara carried through with the plan. They emphasized to the judge that Kareem had seen Amina one time, and they were there immediately afterward. They told the judge that they appreciated him, as a Beit Azari, being a supreme court judge and one of the top clerics, and that they recognized that the Dinar family was not up to his standards, yet they thought that Kareem was a perfect gentleman and very comfortable financially.

To their surprise the judge told them that he had heard about Kareem from two professors at Hebrew College, where he taught. Both had taught Kareem at the Jesuit school, and they knew Kareem well and spoke very highly of him.

“Kareem is supposed to be a very fine person, I am told,” the judge said. “I will have to talk to Amina. As you well know, she was the one who turned down five contenders.”

Hameeda and Sara were in shock. They had thought they would be turned down on the spot. In a few days, they were invited to visit the judge again. He told them there would have to be three different hour-long meetings before Amina could make up her mind. The meetings would be attended by Hameeda, Sara, five female cousins of Amina, and another five female cousins of Kareem. There Amina and Kareem could talk to each other and ask questions of each other.

The two were very surprised at the judge’s suggestion but decided to accept without questioning anything. The meetings took place, and to everyone’s surprise, the chemistry between Amina and Kareem could not have been more in line.

When the judge asked Amina about Kareem, she decided not to express her true feelings. “I will go by what you see fit, father,” she told the judge. The judge got the message. Within three weeks, the decision to marry Amina to Kareem was made. The Dinars accepted every condition the judge made, including agreeing to a back dowry five times as hefty as usual. The judge asked for no up-front dowry.

The wedding of Kareem and Amina was a celebrated one. One

hundred female cousins and friends accompanied her along the mile-long route from her father's top-of-the-hill mansion to the Dinar house. With their headscarves down, they sang and danced all the way. One after another belly danced in front of the procession while the rest clapped and acted as a chorus. They put the scarves back up as they got close to the Dinars' house.

Although Kareem and Amina had spoken to each other on only the three occasions, they each felt they had found the right partner. They both harbored at the time liberal views and practiced what they preached. Kareem treated Amina with deference and respect. She treated him as her loving and prudent partner.

Kareem resumed going to the American Colony Hotel, but now Amina accompanied him. He drank scotch, and she drank lemonade. Their first time there together, Amina told Kareem that she had noticed him before Sara and Hameeda asked for her hand. She had taken several sneak looks at him without him noticing.

Before long, they were socializing with the elites of Jerusalem. On one occasion, Anna arranged for the couple to be invited to a gathering by the British commissioner general of Palestine. Amina shined among the other ten ladies in attendance.

When she was introduced to the commissioner general, her beauty and grace got him to kiss her hand. Amina never forgot the moment. She described it to Hameeda and Sara, and she repeated it to Kareem quite a few times.

Amina and Kareem were by far the most admired couple in Beit Azar. Many would admire their public but graceful exhibit of their love and care for each other. The young women would also wait to look at Amina's most fashionable Italian dresses. This was the couple's love saga for a glorious two years.

## CHAPTER 1

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1922

*Beit Azar, Palestine*

Amina and Kareem Dinar's love story came to an end. They were two people who fancied each other at first sight and then fell passionately in love and became the envy and admiration of the whole village. They crossed boundaries, gracefully adopting some Western habits, and above all, treated each other with equal respect and mutual adoration. Their exchange of emotions and the public manifestations of such exchanges defied all customs, not the least of which—and possibly the most important of which—was the defiance of the full dominance of the male over the female.

Two years after their marriage, Amina brought forth two beautiful and loveable children, a boy and a girl, as she left this world. The girl was five minutes younger than the boy but just as sharp, and she turned out to be more inquisitive. On her deathbed, Amina chose the name Rasheed for a boy and Rasheeda for a girl. She did not consider that she might have twins.

During the fog of the tragedy, Sara, Amina's mother-in-law, and Hameeda, her husband's maternal aunt, had to attend to the affairs of the new additions. Fortunately, thirty young women, all from Beit Azar,

volunteered to nurse the two babies. Those volunteers were not only ready, willing, and able but also rather anxious to act in the memory of the town's "princess." Sara and Hameeda were more than willing to accept the generous offers and organized a routine whereby eight wet nurses would volunteer per day.

Judge Rami, Amina's father, visited Sara a week later to tell her that he was willing to pay for the services of ten wet nurses of her choosing. He had not considered what had transpired in the few days since Amina's death. Upon questioning Sara, the judge was beside himself. It turned out that as many as twenty-five women had nursed the two babies without anyone recording who they were.

According to Muslim teachings, this meant that Rasheed and Rasheeda did not know whom they were eligible to marry in town. A wet nurse, according to these teachings, was and still is considered and treated as a biological mother. Her biological children are considered brothers and sisters of the nursed children, and they may not marry each other.

Kareem visited the babies only when the wet nurses were not in the house. Sara did not want to risk having him observe the bare breast of any woman in town. But that was not hard to do; it was arranged that Sara would call Kareem before he came over.

The twins were not identical. Both were beautiful and acted independently of each other. Rasheeda took more after Amina, and Rasheed took some characteristics from each parent. In profile they were nearly identical, with nuances due to gender, but head-on, they looked very different. They both had chestnut-brown hair, large eyes, slightly brownish skin, shapely eyebrows, and relatively small noses.

They were also pampered. Kareem would not spare any expense. He engaged the services of foreign language tutors for the twins as early as age five. From the start, he decided that they needed to learn English and French. He did not care about Russian, and he decided that Italian might be added later. Dr. Schneider, Amina's German-born gynecologist, tried

to convince Kareem to send them to the German kindergarten; Kareem resisted and instead sent them to the English kindergarten.

Kareem treated both his children equally. When he bought them their first tricycles, he got one for each. He did the same when he bought them their first bicycles.

At the beginning, the twins behaved similarly, but beyond the age of four, their personalities started to split. Rasheed would take the initiative, and Rasheeda would question his decisions. She often asked him to think about or discuss things before he did them. Sara and Hameeda were very impressed by Rasheeda's poise and confidence.

Kareem bought them a small puppy, which was unusual for villagers. Rasheed wanted to call it Baby. Rasheeda reminded him that it would one day grow up and cease to be a baby. She then suggested calling the puppy Baby Ameer. When he got older, they would just call it Ameer. Rasheed liked the idea. He continued to take note of similar pieces of advice from Rasheeda.

All through elementary school, Rasheed and Rasheeda were happy kids. Their relationship remained strong, and Rasheed started to pick up some of Rasheeda's thoughtful habits. On one occasion when Kareem came to pick them up from school, the two got separated, and Rasheed could not be found for ten minutes. Afterward, Rasheeda advised Rasheed that if they were to get separated in the future, they should meet at the gate, on the inside. Rasheeda exhibited the same wisdom when dealing with her classmates. In sixth grade, Rasheed continued emulating Rasheeda's thoughtful behavior and wise expressions, thus becoming more thoughtful himself.

It was a mixed day when the twins graduated from elementary school. Kareem thought that his children had accomplished a lot. They both spoke fluent English and decent French. It had not dawned on him how close they were. Their sense of joint accomplishment was only diminished by the fact that they were planning to go the following year to two different high schools, both run by Jesuits, one for boys and the other for girls.

Sara and Hameeda passed away two months apart. Rasheed and Rasheeda were deeply affected and felt lost for the first few months. Although Sara and Hameeda had slowed down considerably before they passed away, they had made up for Amina's absence, and Rasheed and Rasheeda never lacked for motherly love. Sara and Hameeda cared for them with great devotion and warmth. They made the two children feel whole, such that they did not know what they were missing.

It took the children a while to adjust to their new reality and to overcome the vacuum that the death of their grandmother and great-aunt left behind. Hameeda had prepared them. She had commissioned the preparation of two grave sites, one for her and one for Sara. On two occasions, she showed them the plots. She wanted them to feel sanguine about their inevitable deaths. Those visits helped but only partially.

After their deaths, Kareem moved to live with his children in Sara's house, which he inherited. He also inherited Hameeda's assets, most of which he gave away. He decided to split her dairy business among three needy relatives.

At times, the death of Sara and Hameeda invoked a special feeling of loss in the children, particularly upon visiting the cemetery. Rasheed and Rasheeda routinely went to the cemetery five blocks away and read Koranic verses at their mother's grave, Hameeda's grave, and Sara's grave. They both felt more at ease after their cemetery visits.

The cemetery was also where they would discuss matters they would not have addressed in the presence of their father. In their fourth year of high school, when they were seventeen years old, Rasheeda broached the subject of death and resurrection with her brother. She was surprised to find him rather prepared. He told her that he had decided not to think much about it and to accept Muslim teachings, but at the same time he would not dismiss the beliefs of other people. He had a Druze friend and classmate who told him that the Druze believed in reincarnation. "Just



like the Hindus!” Rasheeda exclaimed. Rasheed added—and Rasheeda agreed—that his friend, Naseem, was free to believe in reincarnation because he was born Druze and that they should continue to believe that there is no reincarnation, since they were born Muslims.

Rasheeda said it mattered not only what one believed in general but what one believed specifically. When Rasheed asked her to explain herself, she offered a most unexpected example. She reminded him that he was circumcised, but she added that Muslims and Jews get circumcised because in the old times people bathed infrequently, once every few weeks, and so this and the lack of circumcision caused diseases under the skin. She explained that since some people now bathed twice a week, they may not need to be circumcised.

Rasheed was shocked and asked Rasheeda to give a different example. She refused. “Why are you afraid of this subject?” she said. “Because I am a woman? Understand this: just because I discuss this subject does not mean I want to have sex.”

Rasheed was speechless. Then Rasheeda told him that he should read the Hadith, the recorded teachings of the prophet, and the writings of Muslim philosophers. He would then understand that such subjects were not taboo then as they are now. “Rasheed, your reactions indicate that you believe that they need to remain taboo,” she said. She reminded him that the Koran had been very clear that Muslims should not eat pork, but no Christian had died from eating pork lately.

At age eighteen and during their fifth year of high school, Rasheeda brought up the subject of foreplay during sex. Rasheed adamantly refused to discuss the subject and reminded Rasheeda that although she was his sister, she was still a female and that such subjects should not be discussed between them. She tried and tried again, but to her disappointment, Rasheed stuck to his guns.

It took Rasheed some time to accept that his sister had become liberal and inquisitive, but with time he started adopting some of her ideas. Before long he would even bring up controversial subjects himself, but

only at the cemetery. Those discussions strengthened their brotherly and friendly relationship further.

The summer between their fifth and sixth years in high school went by very smoothly. Kareem took both children to four Palestinian cities, and on one occasion they slept overnight in Haifa. At that time, Rasheeda was being tutored in French, and Rasheed was being tutored in Arabic literature.

During one of their cemetery meetings Rasheed informed Rasheeda that his Arabic literature tutor had taken another wife. Rasheeda asked him why. Had his first wife become afflicted with a terminal disease? Rasheed's answer was crisp, exhibiting his disgust: "The tutor's first wife was his age, thirty-one, and his second wife was eighteen."

"If men continue to marry more than one wife," Rasheeda said angrily, "women should also be able to have more than one husband."

Rasheed could not believe what he heard. He advised his sister never to repeat such a thing again or else the community—including her own relatives—would deem her crazy. Then she told him that she was joking to make a point: *neither* men nor women should have more than one spouse. "One transgression cannot be made right by another transgression," she said.

She told him that she believed in premarital sex between true lovers, and that the only thing she would not do before marriage was lose her virginity. She thought that a woman's virginity should be preserved for a lifetime lover and the father of one's children: one's husband. Even so, she said she regularly dreamed about having sex with Italian movie stars. Rasheed was at first overwhelmed but then became thoughtful. "Whatever you do, I will have nothing to do with it," he said. "And you'll have to do it very discreetly."

But as usual, Rasheed started adopting many of Rasheeda's beliefs. As the sixth and last year of high school commenced, Rasheed underwent a major transformation. He could see the wisdom in his sister's ideas, and he even came up with challenging thoughts of his own. He

started feeling much more confident about himself. He felt he needed to be more assertive.

What started to bother him most was the inequality between men and women, between boys and girls. He developed the deep suspicion that society followed a double standard, allowing or overlooking men's premarital sexual practices but cruelly and unfairly vilifying those of women.

## CHAPTER 2

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1941

*Jerusalem, Palestine*

Rasheed was very handy, and whenever he volunteered to help out at school, Father Najjar, the principal, took him up on it. Father Najjar's elder brother had taught Rasheed's father, Kareem. Early one evening, Rasheed volunteered to fix some of the woodwork in the school kitchen and proceeded there with his tools in hand. In the front of the kitchen, there was a sliding window through which food used to be handed out to be delivered to the staff. As Rasheed opened that window to pass his broom, mop, and tools through, he was shocked at the sight before him.

It was Father Federico, his French teacher, and Aisha, the young Muslim cook. Father Federico had moved two long tables parallel to each other, about ten inches apart. He had managed to slip his head into the space between the two tables while Aisha, naked from the waist down, was lying with her buttocks on one table and her legs stretched to the other. Father Federico was immersed between her spread legs in what looked like intense oral sex. Rasheed was shocked—not necessarily at the sex, but that it was Father Federico. He slowly attempted to close the window but dropped the mop in the process. Father Federico turned his head and recognized Rasheed.

Rasheed did not know what to do. He was upset at having drawn Father Federico's attention. Shocked and confused, he kept his observation to himself for two days, until he met with Rasheeda at the cemetery, which looked down on the village. It was an ideal setting, because the view from below was blocked by olive and pine trees.

When Rasheed expressed his fear about retribution from Father Federico, she tried to ease his concerns. "Father Federico is the one who should be worried. It is true that if he denies this, he would be believed more than you. But think carefully: He may lose his relationship with Aisha just to exonerate himself from the charge. Maybe he won't risk that."

She continued, "I need to let you know that Imm Samer lent me two books about sex. One of them describes how men get obsessed with sex once they try it. I think Father Federico is no exception." Imm Samer was the mother of their friend Samer. Her name reflected the tradition of women and men using the names of their eldest son. Rasheed agreed with his sister's analysis.

Two weeks later, it was Rasheed's turn to enjoy himself. Whenever he could, he would meet with his female partner in the woods of the forty-acre campus. And there, against the carob tree, he had sex with Leila, his most recent partner, without penetrating her. Coincidentally, Father Federico was painting by himself in the very same area. When Federico heard noises, he got closer, and to his surprise, saw Rasheed and Leila, who was still wearing her underwear.

Federico observed with curiosity and intense concentration. Soon he heard Leila saying, "What is this? It barely took you two minutes. This is over. I am not going to see you anymore. I don't like this."

Leila ended by covering herself and leaving in haste. Father Federico saw a golden and ironic opportunity. He approached and gently confronted Rasheed, who was totally surprised, shocked, and embarrassed, thinking that Federico had been following him in order to take revenge.

In short order, Rasheed convinced himself that the encounter was coincidental. It was clear that Father Federico had gotten there ahead of

him and that the location was no more and no less than a natural spot for painting, surrounded by beautiful natural scenery and lush foliage. It made sense for Father Federico to have chosen that specific spot to paint.

After easing Rasheed's concerns some, Father Federico put his arm around the young man's shoulder and spoke to him softly but firmly. "I am going to teach you how to make love over the coming six weeks, in the time left before your graduation."

Rasheed did not want to have anything to do with Federico. He did not want to be reminded of what he saw Federico do with Aisha, nor did he want to be reminded of his own sexual ineptness. To ease Rasheed's concerns, Federico explained that he planned to leave the priesthood right after the end of the school year. He added that he had joined because his late, very sinful father thought if he forced his son to join the priesthood, God would forgive the father's many transgressions.

Rasheed tried to convince Father Federico that he could do without being tutored about sex and that each of them possessed the other's secret, and as such they were equal. Neither was a threat to the other. But Father Federico would not take no for an answer.

"I am doing this out of care for you," he told Rasheed. "Somebody like you, a nineteen-year-old, should not go through life being a poor lover. Look at you: tall, very handsome, and the first in your class. It would be a big disappointment not to be an accomplished man in love, like you are in other things."

And so it went. Father Federico spent an hour a week for four weeks teaching Rasheed the theory, physiology, emotions, and nature of love-making. He reminded Rasheed that although he was Catholic to the core, he followed Mohammad's teachings when it came to sex.

Rasheed felt insulted that his prophet had anything to do with sex, but Father Federico explained that in the Hadith, the narrative of Mohammad, the prophet had referred to sexual behavior many times. "I know, as I was a professor of Islamic dogma and philosophy at one of the Vatican universities. I am here teaching Italian and French because they

caught me in the Vatican with a beautiful cleaning lady. They sent me back to my country and stripped me of the right to teach college as punishment for my so-called sins.”

Rasheed’s encounters with Federico unsettled him. He became much more aware of the teacher’s presence. Anytime he had a glimpse of Federico, he could not help but watch him. He noticed that Federico was not having lunch in the school cafeteria on Fridays, and he decided to find out why. One Friday he followed the father and witnessed his rendezvous with Aisha. Federico had no idea he was being watched. He took his time. He was slow and deliberate. He warmed Aisha slowly and gently. In the end, he proved to Rasheed that he practiced what he preached. He even cleaned Aisha after finishing, which was most surprising to Rasheed.

Although sincere in trying to educate Rasheed about sex, Federico was intent to gain some leverage against Rasheed just in case the boy might unexpectedly decide to squeal on him. Federico set his plans out of desperation and totally against his better nature. He approached Aisha with so much hesitation and dread that he wondered if she might totally bolt out of the relationship. When she’d heard the mop drop, she’d expected that someone may have been watching them. In this case, Federico reversed one sequence; he told her that Rasheed asked to watch one time in exchange for him not telling what he had seen in the kitchen. Aisha objected but then tearfully agreed to his plans. She was a simple cook in love with Federico, and she did not want to lose him, despite the age difference. Federico told her that she should not worry, since she would not be able to see Rasheed during the planned liaison. And anyway, Federico could have easily kept the event to himself, and she would never have known about it.

To Rasheed’s utter surprise, Federico suggested that Rasheed watch him make love to Aisha during the fifth week at the same spot where Rasheed had been making love to Leila. Federico advised Rasheed to hide behind a specific tree, remain totally quiet, and observe him step by step.

When Rasheed wondered how he could be asking such from him, being a priest, Federico answered in a serious tone.

“I am a priest by name. I never wanted to be a priest, I never liked being a priest, and I never felt like a priest. I was always interested in love and love’s pragmatic manifestations. I am grateful to the Jesuits for educating me; without them I would not have learned even ten percent of the knowledge I possess now.”

He reminded Rasheed that what he had taught him and what he was planning to demonstrate had nothing to do with Christianity and everything to do with Islam. Federico added that since he was planning to leave the priesthood immediately after the school year, it was all right, as a civilian, for him to indulge in teaching others proper sexual behavior.

“You see, Rasheed, my father died two months ago, and I am free from his demands and his sins,” Federico said. “He will end up where he deserves, and it is no longer up to me—it really was never up to me. His final rest cannot be conditioned by any of my own acts.

“What I am telling you comes almost directly from your prophet, Mohammad,” he continued. “I will pin his sayings to the tree you will be hiding behind; many are about foreplay, which until recently you knew nothing about. Over the years, I took the liberty of choreographing the advice of the prophet. The prophet was not very detailed in this sense.”

Rasheed was in a state of astonishment. He could not wait for his regular meeting with Rasheeda, so he immediately went to share the news with her. Her pleasant surprise bewildered him. She was excited that Father Federico would allow Rasheed to observe him in the act. She did not express the slightest condemnation of Federico’s practices.

Instead of condemning or criticizing the arrangement, she told Rasheed that it was a rare opportunity, and that she wanted to observe too. Rasheed at first resisted but then relented, as he believed that equality between the sexes allowed for equal inquisitiveness. He asked her to camouflage herself well, as they could not afford her being discovered by Father Federico.



The day before, they went to the site and rehearsed how to observe. The pine tree designated by Federico stood on a plateau overlooking the carob tree, about seventy feet down an incline.

When the time came the following day, they arrived fifteen minutes early and found nailed to the pine tree a typewritten one-page list of a few of Mohammad's admonishments about sexual foreplay:

1. When you intend to have sex with your wife, do not rush, because the woman also has needs.
2. When any one of you has sex with his wife, then he should not get to her like birds; instead he should be slow and delaying.
3. None of you should fall upon his wife like an animal but let there first be a messenger between you. The messenger should include kisses and romantic words.
4. When his semen comes out, let him keep his body over her until she comes as well, because she comes late.

Rasheed and Rasheeda read Mohammad's admonishments and looked at each other silently. They were more revealing to Rasheed, since Rasheeda had read a version of the Hadith and knew that such advice existed.

Father Federico and Aisha arrived on time, and Rasheed and Rasheeda stopped talking. Federico leaned against the carob tree and hugged Aisha. He slowly rubbed his hands along her body. He massaged her ears and earlobes repeatedly before he slid his hands down her sides all the way inside her thighs. Slowly he went up her thighs, and just as he passed her crotch, he crossed his hands all the way to her breasts. He then circled his hands on each breast three or four times.

He followed that by unbuttoning her blouse and gently removing one clothing piece after another, all the while massaging her. Within fifteen

minutes, Aisha was naked, immersed in her excitement and joy and responding enthusiastically to Federico's careful fondling and caressing.

He sucked her breasts, making sure he went one inch beyond the nipples. As Aisha eased her legs open, Federico's hands went to her genitalia, and with his right hand he massaged her labia and clitoris. Afterward they indulged in oral sex. Aisha reached climax twice. Federico then penetrated her slowly and gently. She went through two more climaxes, as did Federico.

When they finished, an even greater surprise hit Rasheed and Rasheeda. Federico poured water on a towel and cleaned Aisha, which she seemed to expect. She kissed and squeezed Federico as he cleaned her up. He then dressed her piece by piece.

The twins waited for the lovers to leave and then left quietly. They glanced at each other, but they did not talk until it was time to meet at the cemetery. "I liked what Father Federico did except for the penetration," Rasheeda said. "It will not happen to me. I will only allow my husband to do it."

"I liked everything except for the oral sex and him cleaning her up," Rasheed said. "I will not do that."

Having noticed that her brother never commented on her likes and dislikes, Rasheeda told him that they were not that far apart, but they had some minor differences. She could tell he accepted her as equal, free to choose her own way while at the same time bringing his newfound maturity to the fore, taking the lead whenever he could.

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The following week, Father Federico sought out Rasheed and asked him what he thought about what he had observed.

Rasheed answered, "I hope you don't mind my saying it was a star performance."

Federico said that he had been slower than usual so that Rasheed could observe. He put his arm around Rasheed's shoulders and said, "It is

now your turn. You need to pass your final test. Bring Leila back and show me if you have learned your lessons well!”

Rasheed was visibly in shock and resisted, but Federico said that if it was good for Rasheed to observe, it should be good for Rasheed to be observed. After much thought, Rasheed said yes, but only if he could convince Leila, which might be difficult since she was mad at him.

No sooner had he left Federico than Rasheed rushed to talk to his sister. He expressed his deep concerns about convincing Leila to have sex one more time. Rasheeda surprised him. “Go talk to Leila and apologize to her, even if you have to humble yourself. Kiss her hand if you have to.”

Rasheed could barely believe his ears.

“Persist if she turns you down, but be gentle and conciliatory. Humble yourself.”

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Rasheed went to the Jesuit girls’ school to look for Leila. Initially, she would not talk to him. He told her that he was there to give her a silver cross from his father’s inn. She studied the gift. As he dangled the cross, Rasheed said that he needed to see her. “I know things didn’t go very well last time we were together, and I am here to apologize to you. I promise you that things will be different in the future.”

Leila knew exactly what he meant and what he wanted now. He told her that if their encounter was not satisfying for her, they would never see each other again.

Leila looked him in the eye after sensing his humble demeanor and said that if it wasn’t different this time, she would spit in his face.

“If it’s not different, you can spit in my face twice,” he told her.

Encouraged by Leila’s words, Rasheed was about to let her know that a priest would be watching. He thought she might not mind since she and Federico were both Catholic. In the end, he could not bring

himself to tell her. He knew that the act of anyone watching would have been totally unorthodox and equally wrong. He instead decided to keep it from her.

While Leila liked Rasheed a lot, it was all about sex for her, as she was Christian and would not think of marrying a Muslim. But she was curious about Rasheed's promises.

They ended up meeting at the carob tree, as they had done before. Leila was apprehensive and somewhat leery, but then she relaxed. Rasheed asked her not to pull her skirt up and said that he would take care of everything. He told her that he had gotten some water and a towel for her to clean herself afterward. "Unless you want *me* to clean you!"

Leila could not believe her ears. "What happened to you? You are even talking differently! You and I are the same age, but suddenly you sound much more mature!" she exclaimed.

Before long, they were at it: slowly, methodically, and gently, all according to the steps outlined by Federico. Within an hour, Leila achieved three climaxes, Rasheed two. After she cleaned herself, she dressed. After a short pause, she grabbed Rasheed's head and kissed it ten different times. She told him how great he had performed and that she was sorry she was leaving after graduation to enroll in a nursing school in Haifa, far away from him.

Her satisfaction with Rasheed's performance did not last long. Federico was holding on to a branch that accidentally broke and made a noise. While Leila could not see him, she figured out that someone was watching, and she was convinced it was with Rasheed's full knowledge. She gave him a disgusted look, spit in his face, and left without saying a word.

Father Federico invited Rasheed to his office within days and told him that he had done exceedingly well and deserved an A. He also told Rasheed that he and Aisha were moving to Cyprus. He had an offer to teach and tutor French and Italian. He promised that he would be in touch.

Federico then said, "Remember, do not let them undress themselves

or wait for you naked. You must do the honor. They will love you for it afterward.”

Before he left, Federico looked at Rasheed pensively and said in a quiet voice, “I am sorry I put you through this. I had my own critical but selfish reasons, over and above my desire to teach you how to be an accommodating lover. I will make it up to you and to Aisha. I don’t think I will have the opportunity to make it up to Leila.”

## CHAPTER 3

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Rasheed and Rasheeda both graduated with distinction. Rasheed joined his father in managing the two inns, and his father taught him to drive.

Rasheeda took several math courses by correspondence with schools in London. As expected with a straight-A score, she ended up being accepted by the University of London. At the university, she managed to finish six courses over a three-year period, all with top grades.

As high school graduates with fluency in two foreign languages each, the twins felt that they had accomplished more than the average village kid, that their lives were fulfilling, and that the future looked promising. In time, Rasheed started assuming an older brother's role, and Rasheeda started deferring to him much more than the other way around.

Despite his general satisfaction with assuming more responsibilities at the inns and getting to meet tourists of all kinds from all over the world, he felt he could do more. His command of the English language had become very strong and his vocabulary quite good. He engaged in lengthy discussions with some of his guests about current affairs, especially about the war in Europe, and many of his English-speaking hotel guests marveled at his ease of expression and fine diction.

One morning it took Rasheed just minutes to finish his customary

small breakfast of yogurt spread, cucumbers, and tomatoes. He held his cup of mint tea in his hand as he went around the ground floor to turn off a couple of the lights in his father's spacious house, which had been enlarged twice over the years and was easily three times as large as a typical house in Beit Azar.

The living room on the ground floor could easily seat sixty people. The ceiling there was a double height. All the five bedrooms except one, that of his late grandmother, were on the second floor. The ground floor had access to the yard on three sides. The upper floor also accessed the yard by two sets of stairs.

He was in a good mood as he walked through the living room. He was holding a handwritten income statement for the inns that he had prepared, and the results were more impressive than he had thought they would be. After he set down his teacup, he went down three steps to warm up his small British-made Morris car, a habit he picked up from his father. Rasheed kept it in tip-top shape, and at six years old it still seemed brand new.

He had barely gone a block from his house when he noticed a light blue flatbed truck parked on the opposite side of the road. It had its front wheels on the pavement, but its back wheels were stranded on the shoulder, a foot from dropping down a ledge into a fig orchard.

He heard gravel ricochet off the flatbed truck. As he looked to his right, he noticed three kids, all around ten years old, throwing pea gravel from a construction site across the road.

The kids ran away when they saw him. He stopped his Morris, got out, and crossed the highway to inspect the truck. At first, he could not see anybody. He went onto the shoulder to look at the back of the truck and saw the legs of a crouching person. Rasheed crouched and made out a good-looking woman in her early twenties hiding underneath. She was motionless, with distinct fear in her eyes, as if she couldn't figure out the cause of the kids' attack on her.

Likewise, Rasheed could tell from her complexion and green eyes that she was European. He motioned for her to stand up and then immediately

extended his hand. “My name is Rasheed. What is your name?” he said in flowing English.

“My name is Adriana,” she said hesitantly.

“Oh, good, you speak English. Nice to meet you, Adriana. I can see you have a flat tire. I can help. My cousin Hassan lives in this house right here.” He pointed to a simple one-story stone house with green window shutters, barely forty feet away. It had an addition added to it, a garage for Hassan’s repair business.

Even before Adriana responded, he started hollering in Arabic. Within seconds, Hassan came out in mechanic’s overalls, which were similar to what Adriana was wearing but more faded and smudged. Rasheed introduced Hassan, who also spoke English well. He had been an assistant mechanic at the British Army base near Jaffa. Hassan smiled at Adriana and shook her hand, while behaving deferentially to his older cousin.

In a matter of an hour Hassan had fixed the truck tire and excused himself, winking at Rasheed. Adriana took some money out of her pocket. “No, this is on us,” Rasheed said. “You had your flat tire in our village, and by tradition we take care of the damage. Don’t worry about it.”

Adriana shook his hand and thanked him. As she was about to leave, she said, “I cannot go without repaying your kindness in some fashion. I would like to invite you for a drink at the American Colony Hotel with my friends Albina and Natalia. Are you familiar with the American Colony—” She stopped herself. “Excuse me, do you drink in the first place?”

“Yes, I drink scotch, but not Polish vodka,” he said, guessing that she was Polish from her accent. “My father used to have his weekly drink there, and my late mother used to have lemonade. I also deal with the American Colony on a daily basis,” he added. “We are in the same business. My father owns two inns, and we refer guests to each other on a regular basis, whenever we’re full. Where are you from? Poland, I would guess.”

Adriana said that she was part of a Polish Jewish kibbutz between Jerusalem and Nablus. She hastily added, “We are not like many of the



Jewish kibbutzim—we are socialists and believe in equality for Arabs and Jews. We seek to create a socialist state in Palestine.” It sounded as though she wanted to assure him that she and her fellow kibbutzniks were not there to take over Arab land. “Although I have to admit, you are the first Arab man I have met.”

Rasheed caught her looking at him. “I am surprised I am the first, since you are trying to bring Palestinians and Jews together. I have met foreign Jews of all kinds and from dozens of countries—Germany, Poland, England, and Ukraine. They stay at our inns all the time. Anyway, thank you for the invitation. I will try to make it to your gathering with your friends if I can get away. What did you say their names were, Albina and Natalia?”

Adriana looked at him and smiled. “You have a sharp memory, and you have no difficulty recalling Western names,” she said. “The Arab women who help at the kibbutz can barely recall any of our names.”

As Adriana got back in the truck, she waved goodbye. Rasheed waved back and winked at her.

She was cute despite wearing overalls one size too big for her. On the other hand, he cautioned himself, he had to keep his distance. European women could be trouble.

Rasheed had met many foreign women staying at his father’s inns. He had been propositioned, but they were usually too old. On one occasion, he was approached by a young Swedish beauty. When he responded to her obvious interest by saying, “I will see you tomorrow,” she replied that she was leaving for Beirut the following morning. That was the closest he came to having that kind of fun.

All week, he thought about seeing Adriana again and meeting her two friends. For the last three years, he’d thought of trying to meet women but never got around to it. Now that the invitation had come, he would not let the opportunity pass. He decided to make it, no matter what. He worked hard to change his schedule and to make himself available the following Thursday.

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Rasheed entered the English garden of the two-story American Colony Hotel and looked around to greet anyone he might know. He briskly hopped up the three steps fronting the ground floor, as he had enjoyed doing over the years. He looked back into the immaculately manicured English garden to savor the surroundings. Roses of all colors and fragrances sprang up through the greenery. The stonework and figurines in the garden were subdued by the lush bushes but noticeable. Many of the figurines acted as small fountains. They seemed to belong more to an understated country estate than a hotel. He went into the lobby to admire the layout of the furniture. He fancied the prints and stripes of the upholstery, an elegant combination of Italian and Middle Eastern motifs.

As he approached the secluded bar to the right of the lobby, he paused and took his hands out of his pockets. He cleaned off a couple of spots on his navy-blue jacket and his taupe gabardine slacks. Then he stood up straight and entered the bar. As he did so, he saw Adriana. She was wearing maroon trousers, a beige blouse, and a tailored black jacket. Her hair was loose but pulled over her right ear, revealing her bright, made-up face. She looked very attractive, far better than she had in those dusty overalls.

Adriana recognized him immediately and seemed pleased to see him. She moved one stool over and said, "Come and join us. Sit between me and Albina."

She introduced her two friends. When Rasheed focused on Natalia, he noticed her glowing complexion and could feel his pulse quicken. She had a small Polish nose, glittering blue eyes, and a soft smile. She wore a short-sleeved light gray blouse and a dark blue skirt. Her blondish hair was pulled back behind her neck. He was struck by more than just her good looks. Her eyes had a soft, sympathetic look that drew him closer. He immediately wanted to find out more about her.

Natalia looked at Rasheed without saying anything. It was the way she barely smiled and lowered her right eyelid that added to Rasheed's

curious fascination. He responded by making a slight nod, long enough to be observed but short enough to be denied.

Within a few minutes, after the two exchanged several looks to make sure they were on the same wavelength, Adriana and Albina excused themselves. Rasheed felt confident, but he also felt that he wanted to open up to her, as if some kind of perimeter had been lifted.

“I graduated from an English Jesuit school,” he told her.

“Me too. I graduated from a Jesuit school, in Warsaw, and continued for two years trying to become a teacher. I quit college when my father died.” She added that her mother had been a teacher all her life.

This sounded a little familiar to Rasheed. “My mother wanted to become a math teacher but had not finished her college courses when she passed away.”

When he told her that his mother was deceased, and Natalia paused to hear more, Rasheed hesitated; he did not want to talk about it. Neither of them went into any details. Rasheed then mentioned that he came from a village nearby, where he had met Adriana, but he did not mention its name.

Natalia spilled some water on the counter as she was gazing into Rasheed’s eyes. He immediately got a towel and wiped the counter dry. “Did you get any on your clothes?” he asked. When she pointed out several spots on her blouse, he wiped them off. A third spot was over her right breast. He gave the towel to Natalia. “You go ahead and do the rest,” he said, trying not to blush. She took the towel with a laugh, as if to say, “What is the big deal?”

“Thank you for being such a gentleman,” she said as she continued to smile.

The rest of their time together went likewise, with Rasheed intentionally pausing in the give-and-take, leaning back to give her space to react. Above all, he did not dominate the conversation. Whenever he finished talking about himself, he would wait for Natalia to tell him something about herself.

A week later Rasheed was there before the three arrived. Albina and Adriana took a friendly posture, just watching the interaction between Rasheed and Natalia. They had seen the smile on Natalia's face when she first met Rasheed that afternoon.

Rasheed insisted that all three women have two drinks each. They sensed what Rasheed was doing, though: covering up his attraction to Natalia.

He took Natalia's hand and asked, "Would you like me to tell your fortune, Middle East style?"

"I thought you used a Turkish coffee cup to tell one's fortune," Natalia answered in a whimsical tone.

"No, that tells your immediate fortune. The palm tells your long-term fortune."

"Yes, please do," Natalia said, smiling.

"You are destined to meet someone you had not planned to meet. Meeting him will change the course of your life in a way you had not anticipated."

"Can you describe this person to me?" Natalia said.

"No, it is now your turn to describe him and add details of what will happen in the future," Rasheed said.

Natalia laughed. "This is all a trick on your part, and you are good at it."

"No, no, you have to continue," Rasheed said.

"Is it possible that I have already met him, and he is, as they say, tall, dark, and handsome? That is what you wanted me to say!" she cried as her eyes stayed fixed on him.

"He is tall, and he is dark, but I don't know if he is as handsome as you are beautiful," he responded.

She smiled broadly. She put her hand on his and then grasped his arm with both hands. He kissed her gently on the lips as she slid her hands softly down his arm.

"It is time to go," she said. "I will see you next week." She waved goodbye, smiling at him.