

Saying Goodbye

By

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Muslim Writers Publishing

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Introduction of Islamic Rose Books Family and Friends

Rose—Leader of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old only child, Christian background, mixed ethnicity, USA

Camelia—Member of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old only child, Muslim, Egyptian-American

Ruby—Member of Hijab-Ez, eleven-year-old only child, Protestant Christian, Vietnamese National

Christina—Member of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old with 4 siblings, Catholic Christian, Hispanic-American

Reyhannah—New Member of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old with 4 older brothers, Muslim, Indian-American whose parents emigrated from India, USA

Grandma (Linda)—Rose's grandma, police officer, avid gardener, loves crafts, searching for truth about God, doesn't claim any religious affiliation, and believes in God but not the trinity, mixed ethnicity, USA

Grandpa (Ray)—Rose's grandpa, retired police officer, works evenings in security, Catholic Christian, Hispanic-American, USA

Dad (Tony)—Rose's father, single parent, lives next door to Rose's grandparents, Catholic Christian, mixed ethnicity, USA

Fahd—Saudi Arabian police officer, lives at Grandma's home for one year, Muslim, kind and smiles a lot, great story teller

Abdul—Saudi Arabian police officer, lives at Grandma's home for one year, Muslim, loves books and astron

Sylvia—Grandma and Rose’s friend, owner of The Phoenician Restaurant, married to an Arab Muslim, mixed ethnicity, USA

Judy—Camelia’s mother, Muslim revert, loves jewelry, co-owner of Casa Camelia Restaurant, married to an Egyptian, mixed ethnicity, USA

Definition: Hijab-Ez (pronounced *hijab-ease*) is a word Rose made up to identify the group of Muslim and non-Muslim friends who joined together to support her hijab-wearing school friend, Camelia. A member of the Hijab-Ez is a girl who wears a head covering regardless of her religious beliefs.

Prologue

Fahd and Abdul are Saudi Arabian police officers who came to the USA for one year and are staying at Grandma's house. They have successfully completed a six-month English course at Arizona State University and are attending advanced police training at the Phoenix Police Department. They continue to share their culture and Islamic values with Rose, family, and friends.

Ten-year-old Rose and her three friends are known at their public school as the Hijab-Ez because Rose, Ruby, and Christina wear headscarves each day to school to support their friend Camelia, who is a Muslim. During the first semester of their fifth grade year, the four girls have become loyal friends. They have met and overcome many challenges and their friendship has been tested. The diversity of their religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds has united the four girls not divided them. During the second semester of the school year, the Hijab-Ez faced many new challenges at school and with their families. The wisdom in the Islamic stories they heard from Fahd and Abdul, and family stories of the past, shared by family members, helped Rose and the Hijab-Ez make decisions and solve problems.

Rose and the Hijab-Ez are about to learn there are many kinds of goodbyes. Saying goodbye can be casual—the kind where you expect to see someone again real soon. Then, there are the letting-go kind of goodbyes that often cause hurt and regret. Rose will soon learn that when another person says a different kind of goodbye and changes, her life is changed, too. The hardest kind of goodbye is the forever kind of goodbye that brings heartache and loss; but

when faced with courage, sadness can be overcome, hope can triumph, and fond memories will remain.

Chapter 1—Something Better

Rose was carrying a stack of freshly laundered towels down the hallway when she heard squealing vehicle tires and a blaring horn sound insistently. Rose put the towels on Grandma's bed and decided to go investigate. The commotion sounded like it was coming from in front of Grandma's house.

Rose put her hand on the front door knob, and jumped when she heard the three loud knocks and the doorbell ring. Rose called out, "Just a minute." She hurried through the house to the kitchen door, opened it, and called out to her grandma, "Somebody is at the front door. They knocked real loud and rang the doorbell."

Rose ran back to the living room and looked out the window. Her next-door neighbor, Mr. Gleason, was standing in the middle of the road next to a large blue car that was stopped in the roadway. A tall man with black-rimmed glasses was squatting down and putting something on what looked like a towel. Mr. Gleason and this man began walking towards Grandma's house. Rose saw a furry tail trailing from the edge of the towel. The furry tail was the same multi-color as Abu. "Oh, No!" Rose wailed aloud as she watched Mr. Gleason and the stranger approach the front porch.

Grandma hurried into the living room when she heard Rose's wail and was just in time to see Rose burst into loud sobs. The doorbell rang again, and Grandma opened the door. Mr. Gleason and the tall stranger stood there. The stranger cringed when he saw Rose standing next to Grandma with tears streaming down her cheeks. "I'm truly sorry. I put on my brakes, but I

couldn't stop in time. The kitten ran out in front of my car. I think the kitten is hurt pretty bad and needs to see a vet right away."

Rose reached out to take hold of the bloodied towel holding her beloved Abu, but Mr. Gleason gently put his arm out to keep her from grasping the towel. "Abu is hurt, Rose, and we mustn't move him too much."

Grandma found her voice and said to Mr. Gleason, "Can you hold Abu and go with us to the vet's office?"

"Sure I can. Let me tell my wife where we are going."

"Rose, go get the car keys and my purse. Hurry now!" Grandma said as she looked at the stranger.

"Is it alright if I follow you to the vet's clinic? I would like to see what happens and help if I can. My name is Adam Harper and I live on the next street, 10th Street."

"I am sure you tried to stop in time. These things happen and sometimes cannot be avoided. Try not to feel too, badly. You can follow us to the Best Pet Clinic on Broadway. Do you know the location?" Grandma asked.

"I take my two dogs there for their shots and such," Mr. Harper replied.

Mr. Gleason returned and carefully took the towel with Abu from Mr. Harper. Rose, still crying silently, petted Abu's head as he mewed weakly. She looked at Mr. Harper and frowned, but didn't say anything as she handed Grandma the car keys. Rose and Mr. Gleason got into the back seat of Grandma's car. In less than ten minutes, Grandma pulled into the parking lot in front of the clinic. Mr. Harper parked his car next to Grandma's, and the three adults, Rose, and her injured Abu went inside the clinic.

The receptionist took one quick look at Abu, and then called the doctor on the PA system. Dr. Aimes hurried to the foyer where Rose was waiting with Abu and the grown-ups. Dr. Aimes motioned for Mr. Gleason and Rose to follow him to the examining room, while Grandma and Mr. Harper took seats in the foyer to wait.

Mr. Gleason placed the bloody towel and Abu on the examination table, and then sat in one of the chairs next to the wall near the doorway. Rose stood on the other side of the table and finally found her voice. “Dr. Aimes can you fix Abu? I think he is hurting awful. Poor Abu,” Rose crooned to Abu as she gently stroked his ears.

“I don’t know yet, Rose. Please sit next to your friend while Nurse Nancy and I have a look-see,” Dr. Aimes said gently to Rose as Nurse Nancy steered Rose to the chair beside Mr. Gleason.

Mr. Gleason said softly, “Rose, I am going to get your grandma and I will wait in the foyer with Mr. Harper.” Rose nodded her head, but didn’t take her eyes away from watching Dr. Aimes and Nurse Nancy.

“Please God, don’t let my kitty die,” Rose whispered. Grandma came into the examination room and sat down next to Rose. She put her arm around Rose and pulled her close. Rose and Grandma sat silently together while they watched the doctor and nurse work on Abu.

Nurse Nancy left the room and returned with medicine that Dr. Aimes told Rose he was going to give Abu in a shot to help with the pain. Rose nodded her head and continued to pray silently. Time seemed to go by slowly. Finally, Dr. Aimes turned from the examining table and approached Rose and Grandma.

“Rose, why don’t you go over and talk to your friend, Abu, while Nurse Nancy finishes cleaning him?” Doctor Aimes said in a kindly voice.

“Is he going to be okay?” Rose asked hopefully.

“I need to talk with your grandma a moment, and then we will talk about Abu’s injuries,” Dr. Aimes answered and motioned for Grandma to follow him out of the examination room.

In the hallway, Dr. Ames said very softly, “I am so sorry, but Abu’s back is broken and he has suffered severe internal injuries. I cannot help him. He can stay here, so we can keep him comfortable until he dies, or we can put him to sleep. I recommend you give us permission to put him to sleep to ensure he doesn’t suffer needlessly.”

“You are sure there is nothing that can be done, Doctor?” Grandma asked, knowing the doctor would not have told her what he did, if there was any hope. Yet, she had to ask.

“No, I am very sorry. Do you want me to talk to Rose or do you want to do this?”

“I think Rose will accept that Abu will die if she hears you tell her and explain why he cannot be helped,” replied Grandma sadly.

“What do you want to do for Abu?”

“I think we should ask Rose and see if she wants to make the decision. She can stay with him for a little while, can’t she?” Grandma asked.

“I think we should allow a short time, and then, if she wants to hold Abu when I give him the shot, that would be okay. Abu will die very quickly and appear to just fall asleep.”

Grandma nodded her head and told the doctor she was going to the foyer to explain the situation to Mr. Gleason and Mr. Harper.

Grandma walked to the foyer and explained that Abu could not be helped. She suggested Mr. Harper give Mr. Gleason a ride home as their waiting any longer would not benefit anyone. Grandma was concerned Rose might be angry at the loss of her kitten and speak inappropriately to poor Mr. Harper. He looked so distraught. Grandma assured Mr. Harper that he was not to blame and watched as the two men left the clinic.

When Grandma returned to the examining room, Rose was sitting on the examination table holding Abu. She was crying quietly and stroking his forehead. “Poor little Abu,” she crooned to her kitten.

The doctor motioned to Grandma and whispered, “When I returned to the examination room, Rose seemed to know her kitten was dying. She asked me to help her kitty go to sleep. Rose told me that she watched Animal Hospital on television and knew how animals were put to sleep with a shot of medicine. I was quite surprised at how brave Rose is behaving. I gave the kitten the shot a minute or so before you got here.”

Grandma nodded her head in understanding and went to stand next to Rose. “Shall we take Abu home and bury him, or have Dr. Aimes take care of this?”

Rose looked up with tear-swollen eyes and smiled wanly at her grandma. “We have to take him home with us, because Dr. Aimes doesn’t have a yard here to bury animals. I don’t want Abu to get burned up in the incinerator,” she said matter-of-factly.

Nurse Nancy took Abu from Rose’s arms and placed him in a clean, white wrapping and a large bag. Grandma steered Rose out the side door, and then remembered about paying the doctor. Nurse Nancy told Grandma that Mr. Harper had already settled the bill.

The ride home was very quiet. Grandma didn't say anything. She was waiting for Rose to speak. They arrived home to see Fahd and Abdul talking with Mr. Gleason. When Grandma parked the car, Fahd opened the back door and gently took the white bag from Rose's arms. "I am sorry, Little Sister," Fahd said gently.

Abdul shut the car door after Rose got out, and they all walked to the backyard. "I think we should bury Abu under the orange tree in the shady patch where the grass never grows," Rose said softly and looked at her grandma for approval.

"I think that is a good place for Abu to sleep," Grandma replied with a warm smile for Rose.

Mr. Gleason gave Rose a hug and said his goodbyes. His wife was waiting to hear what had happened.

Abdul went to the shed and got a shovel. He and Fahd took turns digging the hole for Abu. When they finished digging, Rose carefully laid Abu in the hole. "Wait a minute. I want to get a flower for Abu." Rose went into the shed, got the cutting shears, and cut a pink rose from one of the bushes next to the side wall. She laid the rose on top of the white bag covering Abu.

Rose stood silently beside Grandma as Fahd shoveled the dirt until the hole was filled. "Poor little Abu," Rose murmured softly, and then walked slowly to the back door of the house, and went inside. Grandma, Fahd, and Abdul went inside a few moments later to find Rose sitting in Grandma's recliner in the family room.

"Honey, are you okay?" Grandma asked with concern in her voice.

Fahd and Abdul sat down on the couch, and Grandma sat on the arm of Rose's chair and waited for Rose to reply.

With a small catch in her voice, Rose spoke to no one in particular, “I asked God to help Abu, but Abu still died. The doctor couldn’t help him. Why didn’t God answer my prayer?”

“Sometimes God answers our prayers in ways we don’t recognize or understand right away,” replied Grandma.

“Your kitty would not be able to walk, if he had lived. He would not be able to jump and play, or get his food and water,” Abdul said carefully. “Perhaps Allah knew this would not be good for your kitty?”

Rose considered what Grandma and Abdul said for a few moments. She turned to look at Fahd and asked him, “When I go to heaven will I see Abu?”

Fahd’s eyes were so sad looking as he watched his “little sister” struggle to accept the loss of her dear little cat. He answered her question in a soft and soothing voice, “Allah has promised that we will be happy when we live forever in Paradise. If seeing Abu in Paradise is what will make you happy, then this would not be difficult for Allah to do for you. He is the Creator of all living things. Many times when we lose something we love, Allah replaces what we lose with something better.”

Rose nodded her head slowly at Fahd. “It’s hard to say goodbye to someone you love. I know Abu was a cat and not a person, but I loved him a lot because he was my friend.”

“I know how sad you must feel right now, Rose. Remember that when God takes someone we love, He also comforts us. Be patient, dear, and please don’t be mad at Mr. Harper. He felt so bad and he tried very hard not to hit Abu with his car.”

“I know, Grandma. I am sorry now for looking so mean at him. Can I write him an apology note and take it to his house?”

“That would be very nice, Rose. Mr. Harper paid the bill at the hospital for us. It was very generous of him to do this. He has two dogs and he takes the dogs to see Dr. Aimes. Maybe we can meet his dogs?” Grandma suggested.

Rose nodded her head and said, “Grandma, I’m tired. I think I’ll take a nap until my dad gets home.” Rose looked over at Abdul and Fahd. “Thank you for helping me bury Abu.” She stood up and walked slowly out of the room. Rose’s shoulders and head were bowed as she walked to her study-playroom and quietly closed the door behind her.

* * *

The next afternoon, Rose and Grandma were in the family room. “Grandma, do you think Grandpa will mind picking up Ruby and Christina tomorrow? Their parents said they could go with me to see Camelia in the play at the Islamic School.” Rose tugged on Grandma’s arm to get her attention. Grandma had been reading the Qur’an for the past hour, and Rose had been trying to read, too; but her thoughts wandered, first to her kitty, Abu, and then her thoughts went in another direction as she began thinking about Camelia’s play tomorrow. She had difficulty concentrating on her own book and gave up trying to read anymore.

“If you ask him, I’m sure he won’t mind,” replied Grandma as she raised her head and pushed her glasses back up her nose towards her eyes.

Every time Grandma reads books, her glasses slip down her nose because she bends her head down while reading. I wonder if Grandma gets a sore neck from her head bobbing up and down. One of these days, I'm going to see her glasses fall off!

“Grandpa says you need some new glasses,” Rose giggled.

“My glasses are just fine,” Grandma sputtered indignantly, and then she had to laugh with Rose as she pushed her glasses back and raised her head to look at her smirking granddaughter.

“Did I tell you that Camelia’s mom surprised Ruby and Christina? She gave them hijab scarves to wear tomorrow when we go to the play,” Rose said happily.

“Your friends will be glad to trade in their handkerchief scarves for a real hijab scarf. You, Christina, and Ruby have been loyal to Camelia all year. I thought that after a few weeks the three of you would get tired of wearing the handkerchiefs each day at school, but I was proved wrong,” replied Grandma thoughtfully.

“We are the Hijab-Ez! Friends forever!” exclaimed Rose.

The Hijab-Ez were a group of friends formed by Rose during the second week of school. Rose, Christina, and Ruby wore a handkerchief scarf on their heads each day at school to show support for their Muslim friend, Camelia. The Hijab-Ez were learning a lot about Islam through their friendship with Camelia and her family, and getting to know Fahd and Abdul.

The front door closed with a loud bang. Rose heard Grandpa talking to the door as if the door would talk back! “Alright, already,” Grandpa grumbled.

Rose and Grandma looked at each other, and they both tried really hard to keep a straight face as Grandpa entered the family room wearing a huge scowl on his face. “I’ve fixed

that door a hundred times, and still it closes with a bang. It's as if the wind just waits around, ready for me to open that door so it has a chance to slam it shut!"

"My, aren't we the grumpy one this afternoon. Did you have a bad day at work?" asked Grandma.

"Every day is a bad day when you have to go in to work on your day off," Grandpa mumbled under his breath.

"I heard that," giggled Rose. She couldn't help herself. Grandpa was usually calm and rarely raised his voice. It was unusual for him to be so grumpy about his work. "Grandma said you volunteered to go in to work today."

Grandpa looked sheepishly at Rose and Grandma, and replied, "You're right. I did volunteer when my boss called to tell me Joe was sick today. I shouldn't be so grumpy." Grandpa smiled at Rose and then hugged her and Grandma.

"Remember about Camelia's play tomorrow? Can we pick up Christina and Ruby before we drive to the Islamic school?" Rose looked up at her grandpa and added a sweet smile to her request.

"Didn't your dad say he would take you girls and then pick you up when the play was over?" asked Grandpa.

"That was the plan, but his boss called, and now my dad has to go in to work tomorrow because someone got sick. My dad didn't volunteer; he got told he had to go into work," Rose pouted as she finished her response to Grandpa.

Rose and her dad lived next door to Grandpa and Grandma. Rose's mother left when Rose was only a baby, and Grandma and Grandpa helped her dad take care of her when he was at work or away from their home.

"Now look at who is being grumpy," laughed Grandma.

Grandma, Grandpa, and Rose burst into peals of laughter. No one could ever stay mad for very long in Rose's family! Grandma and Grandpa exchanged glances. It was good to hear Rose laugh today. She was missing Abu, but trying very hard not to let her sadness prevent her from having other feelings. It was hard for Rose to say goodbye to Abu, but she was very brave and her grandparents were proud of her.

* * *

Rose threw the covers off and jumped out of bed. Today was Camelia's play! Rose hurried to put on the special dress she had picked out the night before. The dress was long-sleeved, and the skirt barely touched the tops of her ankles. It was blue, like the color of a cloudless summer sky, and tiny, pink roses trimmed the high collar, cuffs, and the edge of the hemline. Grandma was going to braid her hair when she went next door after she finished breakfast. Dad was already up, dressed for work, and busy in the kitchen frying some eggs for Rose.

"Do you want one piece of toast or two?" Dad asked as Rose sat down on a stool at the kitchen counter.

“Good morning, Dad. One piece of toast is enough.” Rose smiled at her dad as he placed the plate of eggs in front of her.

“You look real pretty in your dress, but your hair looks like a bird’s nest,” Dad laughed and poured Rose some orange juice.

Rose made a silly face at her dad, pulled a piece off the slice of toast, and dunked it into the runny egg yolk. In no time, Rose cleaned her plate and took the last gulp of orange juice. After a quick trip to the restroom to brush her teeth, Rose announced she was ready to go over to Grandma’s house to get her hair combed and braided.

As Rose stood on tiptoe to kiss her dad goodbye, he looked down and said very seriously, “Remember, Rose, you are a Christian, and I don’t want anyone at Camelia’s masjid or school trying to get you to be a Muslim, you hear?”

Rose looked up at her dad’s solemn face. “Don’t worry, Dad. This is a kid’s play, and only girls and women will be there. The play is at the weekend-school building. I won’t be going to the masjid, and Ruby and Christina will be with me, too! See ya when you get home from work.” Rose hugged her dad and then waited in the carport until he backed his truck out onto the street and headed off to work. *I wonder why Dad is always worrying about my Muslim friends trying to get me to be a Muslim. Maybe it’s because Fahd and Abdul are Muslim and they are living at Grandma’s house this year,* Rose thought as she walked across the yard and opened the front door to Grandma’s house.

Grandma had learned from a flyer distributed by the local police department that police officers from Saudi Arabia were looking for American homes to board in while they studied in the USA. Fahd and Abdul were police officers from Saudi Arabia. Last Spring, they came to the

USA to learn English at the state university and receive training at the city police department. Abdul moved into Grandma's house first, and then, a few months later, Fahd moved there, too. Rose and Grandma helped them learn English, and now Grandma was helping them with their police training classes. Rose was happy her grandparents decided to have Fahd and Abdul live at their home. Rose loved Fahd and Abdul, as they were so kind and funny. They sometimes called her Warda, the Arabic word for Rose, but mostly they called her "Little Sister."

"Grandma, Grandpa, anybody here?" Rose called as she walked through the living room towards the dining room.

"I'm in my bedroom, and Grandpa has gone to pick up Christina and Ruby," Grandma called out to Rose.

Rose walked back to her study-playroom and got her brush and hair ties for her braids. Rose loved spending time in her study playroom. Her grandparents had helped her redecorate the room last winter. Rose had chosen pink and lavender panel drapes to cover the only window in the room. Grandma had found a daybed at the second-hand store, and Grandpa had painted the wrought-iron frame white. Her bed looked like a couch in the daytime, and had pillows covered with the same purple and pink material as her window drapes.

Rose had tons and tons of stuffed animals, and they used to be scattered everywhere until Grandpa got a great idea. He built a shelf high up on each wall and Rose placed most of her animal friends on the shelves, which ringed the three windowless walls of her room. Her special animal buddies, like the unicorn, the teddy bears Fahd and Abdul had given her, and a white cat stayed on her day bed. Rose and Grandma had decided to build a bookcase for all of Rose's books and knick-knacks. They went to the lumberyard and bought six long boards and

eighteen cinder blocks. The boards were stacked between the cinder blocks, making six long shelves that ran nearly the length of one of the bedroom walls.

Dad had decided to join the redecorating project, too. He brought home an old wooden desk that was scratched in many places, but was sturdy and had two big desk drawers and a hutch that sat on top of the desk. Rose kept all her special stuff, like Jammie, her journal, in the top desk drawer. Grandpa had found some large colored plastic tubs that looked like barrels, and Rose stashed her skates, bicycle helmet, tennis racket, Frisbees, and other sports stuff in the barrels. Dad had even given Rose his old blue recliner so she could have a place to sit, relax, and read her books.

Grandpa had bought Rose a huge corkboard, which he mounted on the only wall in the room that wasn't covered with posters of animals. Rose used the board for tracking homework assignments and putting up cool stuff she found in newspapers or magazines. In the lower right corner, she pinned her monthly calendar. Rose liked to do her homework in her study-playroom because it was her special place filled with all her treasures.

Her favorite object in the room was the tall cabinet in one corner, which held her rock collection, which was stored in different sizes and colors of cookie tins. Next to her rock collection stood her telescope, which Abdul had taught her how to use to find constellations and planets on clear Arizona nights. Rose smiled as she looked at her recently cleaned sanctuary and turned off the overhead light.

She met Grandma in the hallway, and they both walked to the family room together. Grandma brushed Rose's fine golden hair until it shone, and then quickly made two braids, and

pinned them at the top of Rose's head. Next, she helped Rose put on the blue hijab scarf Camelia's mother, Judy, had given her earlier that year.

Rose twirled around and asked, "How do I look?"

"Ready to go when Grandpa arrives with your friends." Grandma smiled at Rose as she twirled around the room. "If you're not careful, you'll make yourself dizzy!" exclaimed Grandma.

Just then, Rose heard the toot of Grandpa's truck horn. "They're here!" shouted Rose as she raced for the front door. Grandma hurried after Rose and watched as Rose climbed into the back seat of the truck. Grandma waved at Ruby and Christina, and smiled at the three young girls all dressed up in their long dresses and pretty hijab scarves. "Have a good time and say 'Salaams' to Camelia and her mom for me," Grandma called out to Rose and company.

"Hijab-Ez," Rose greeted her two friends as she fastened her seatbelt.

"I just love your dress," squealed Christina.

"Me, too," Ruby said more sedately.

"Wow! Your hijab scarves are really pretty!" Rose looked carefully at the new hijab scarves her friends were wearing. Ruby was wearing a green silk dress and a matching green hijab scarf that had small pearl beads trimming the edges. Christina was wearing a yellow chiffon dress with a matching hijab scarf that was a shade lighter in color and had small white daisies bordering its hem.

"I think each of you look lovely. You will feel very comfortable with Camelia's classmates who will be wearing hijabs." Grandpa smiled at the three girls, and then turned

forward, and began backing the truck from the driveway. “See you later, Grandma!” the three girls shouted and waved excitedly.

In less than five minutes, Grandpa drove into the parking lot across from the masjid. Camelia and her family attended. The parking lot was over half full, and more cars were entering as Grandpa parked his truck.

Rose gazed at the masjid in front of her. She loved participating with Camelia and her family in Muslim community activities. The masjid was so beautiful with its whitewashed walls and cobalt blue tile trimming. A gold dome and a slender minaret topped the masjid, giving it a beauty Rose could only feel in her heart, but could not find any words to express. A large, enclosed courtyard separated the masjid from a long, two-story building that housed the weekend Islamic school. Part of the building was still under construction. When it was finished, the Islamic school would be open for kindergarten through eighth grade for each school year. Part of the courtyard was filled with playground equipment, and several tall date-palm trees provided minimal shade for the benches surrounding the courtyard walls.

Rose looked towards the doorway of the Islamic school building and saw Camelia and her mother, Judy, waving at them. Rose also saw another young girl standing next to Camelia holding Camelia’s hand. *Hmmm...I wonder who she is.*

Judy, Camelia, and the young girl walked across the parking lot to greet the girls and Grandpa as they piled out of the truck. “As-Salaam’Alaykum,” Rose greeted Camelia, her mother, and her friend.

“Wa’alaykum as-Salaam,” they greeted Rose, Grandpa, Ruby, and Christina.

“You three look very nice today. You did a good job fixing your hijab scarves in place,” Judy said to the three girls.

Ruby and Christina thanked Judy for their gifts. Rose, Christina, and Ruby looked questioningly at Camelia and the girl standing next to her. “This is my friend Reyhannah. We are in the same Islamic class on Sundays, and our parents are good friends.” Camelia smiled at her friend as she introduced Rose, Christina, and Ruby. “Please meet Rose’s grandfather.”

Reyhannah looked shyly at Rose, the gathered friends, and Grandpa, and said, “I am happy to meet you.”

Judy and Grandpa talked for a few minutes while the girls walked towards the school building. Rose turned around and ran back to hug her grandpa. “Bye, Grandpa. I love you so much! And thanks for bringing us this morning.”

Grandpa returned Rose’s hug and said, “Judy just volunteered to bring you girls home. She is treating all of you to lunch at The Phoenician Restaurant. Grandma and I will see you later on this afternoon.”

“Awesome!” Rose exclaimed and hurried back to her friends, who were waiting by the doorway for her return. As Rose approached her friends, she overheard Ruby asking Reyhannah if she had a part in the play. Before Reyhannah could answer, Camelia answered for her. “Reyhannah has one of the lead roles. She will be playing the part of Khadijah, and she helped design the stage decorations.”

Rose narrowed her eyes and looked carefully at Reyhannah. She noticed that Reyhannah had very dark brown skin and almond-shaped eyes that were as black as coal. A few wisps of shiny black hair were peeking out from the red hijab scarf she was wearing. Reyhannah was

wearing baggy red pants and a long, matching, red tunic top that had long, wide sleeves trimmed in gold braid. *Reyhannah doesn't look Arab and she doesn't look Mexican like Christina. I wonder what country or culture she is from*, Rose wondered silently. Rose watched as Reyhannah and Camelia held hands and walked in front of her. They entered the school building, with Ruby and Christina following them inside. Rose waited outside until Judy crossed the parking lot.

“I didn’t know Camelia had a special friend. She never mentioned Reyhannah to the Hijab-Ez.” Rose’s lowered and subdued voice alerted Judy that Rose was a mite troubled about not knowing anything about Camelia’s other friend, Reyhannah.

“Reyhannah and her family live in Mesa, and she attends another public school. Camelia sees Reyhannah at weekend Islamic school because this is the only school open for Muslim girls and boys. Reyhannah is Camelia’s special Muslimah friend, and the Hijab-Ez’ are her special non-Muslim friends. But you, sweet Rose, are her very special, I-haven’t-decided-what-I-believe-about-God friend,” Judy smiled at Rose and was relieved to see a slow smile light up Rose’s face. “Reyhannah is a wonderful girl, and I am sure you will like her as much as Camelia does once you come to know her better,” Judy said encouragingly.

“She does seem to be nice, and Camelia wanted us to meet Reyhannah. I am just being silly,” Rose said sheepishly as she and Judy went inside to look for the other girls.

Judy and Rose found Ruby and Christina seated in the second row of chairs before a small stage. “Camelia and Reyhannah had to go back stage to make sure the props are ready,” whispered Ruby as Rose sat next to her.

The stage was decorated with dozens of colored scarves hanging from the stage ceiling. A large, multicolored tent was erected on the right side of the stage, and a fake palm tree with

colored pillows scattered before it in a circle were on the left side of the stage. A large silver banner was stretched on a rope or heavy cord across the top front of the stage. The banner had Arabic writing on it. “What does the banner say?” Christina whispered to Judy.

“The first line on the banner says, ‘*La ilaha ill-Allah*,’ which means, ‘there is no god but Allah (God).’ The second line says, ‘Allahu Akbar,’ which means, ‘God is the Greatest.’ The last line says, ‘Alhamdulillah,’ which means, ‘All praise is to God.’”

“Do you know what the play is about? Camelia wouldn’t tell me,” whispered Ruby to Rose.

“Remember the story about the wives of the Prophet that Fahd told me, and then I told you? Well, Camelia told her teacher the story, and they decided their play would be about the wives of the Prophet.” On each chair was a paper that described the cast of characters in the play. “This paper about the play says that Reyhannah is reciting the part of Khadijah, the Prophet’s first wife. Camelia told me that it is the longest part in the play. Camelia will be reciting the part of Safiyah. No one wanted to take this part because Safiyah was a Jew before she reverted to Islam and married the Prophet. Camelia volunteered to take the part of Safiyah,” replied Rose.

“Don’t the Muslims like the Jews?” asked Christina.

“I think it has something to do with the Israeli and the Palestinian people that have been fighting each other since Israel was made a country by the United Nations,” whispered Rose.

Ruby and Christina stared blankly at Rose. Neither one really liked to study history, but Rose and her grandma were nuts-o about history. Just ask Rose a history question, and she or her grandma would know or find the answer!

“Shish! The play is getting ready to begin,” whispered Judy.

The Islamic school teacher, Zaynab, stepped to the center of the stage and greeted the audience. Everyone called back, “Wa’alaykum as-Salaam.”

“Today, the ICC Islamic School presents an original play titled ‘The Wives of the Prophet.’ Our fifth and sixth grade class created the script and set designs with the help of Allah and the writings of Muslim scholars. Please hold all applause until the play is over and all students appear together on the stage. I have been told that we have some guests today from outside of our Muslim community. I want to welcome each of you. We hope you will enjoy the play.”

Camelia walked across the stage and stood in the center of it. She held a microphone in her right hand and began to describe the city of Mecca, which was the setting for the play. She was the narrator for the play, too. Each girl in the play took her turn walking to the center of the stage and, after introducing herself, recited the story of one of the wives of the Prophet.

When the play was over, the audience clapped loudly, and many women in the audience murmured “All praise be to Allah” and “Allah is the Greatest!”

Camelia hurried to where her friends and mother were waiting near the door. “Did you like the play? Wasn’t it awesome?” Camelia gushed excitedly.

Judy hugged her daughter and smiled. “The story of the Prophet’s (pbuh) wives is so wonderful, and you and the other students were outstanding!”

“Thanks, Mom!” Camelia hugged her mother and looked expectantly at her friends.

Rose, Ruby, and Christina grabbed Camelia and hugged her.

“You were wonderful,” exclaimed Ruby.

“The play was great!” Ruby chimed in.

“Our hero!” added Rose with a big grin.

Camelia grinned back happily at her friends, and then noticed Reyhannah standing alone, a few feet away from them.

“Come join us, Reyhannah,” Camelia motioned with her arm stretched out towards Reyhannah. Camelia lowered her voice and told her friends that Reyhannah’s family could not come to the play today, so Reyhannah was just a little sad.

Camelia’s Hijab-Ez friends turned and smiled at Reyhannah. “You were real good in your part, Reyhannah,” Rose said as Reyhannah walked over and stood next to Judy.

“It was a good play, you two,” added Christina with a friendly smile for Reyhannah.

Ruby stepped in front of Reyhannah and hugged her. “Your speech was the longest of anyone’s and you didn’t make any mistakes!”

A beautiful smile spread across Reyhannah’s face and she stretched out her hands to the Hijab-Ez saying, “Thank you. I am so happy that you liked our play.”

“We have to hurry now, girls. Reyhannah, Camelia, and I are going to get ready for prayer, and the three of you are going to wait for us in the school library. There are some interesting books for kids that you can look at while we are at prayer. We will only be gone for about thirty minutes. Will you be okay waiting in the library for us?” asked Judy.

Rose and Christina nodded their heads okay. “Can we go with you to the masjid?” asked Ruby.

“Not today, dear. I didn’t get permission from your parents, but the next time I will be sure to ask for you,” replied Judy.

Sure enough, in less than thirty minutes, Judy, Camelia, and Reyhannah came to the library to get Rose, Ruby, and Christina. Judy and her Hijab-Ez girls walked across the parking lot to the restaurant. Rose hung back and pulled on Camelia’s sleeve.

“Why didn’t you ever mention Reyhannah?” questioned Rose in a lowered voice.

“None of the Hijab-Ez knew her, so I didn’t think to mention Reyhannah,” Camelia answered, just a little defensively.

“I thought that you and I were best friends and we always tell each other everything,” Rose said softly.

“We are best friends, and Reyhannah is also my friend. I was hoping you would like her, Rose.”

“I do like her and she seems real nice,” Rose answered quickly.

“Good! Now, if Ruby and Camelia like her, everything will work out great!” Camelia said and smiled at her best friend.

“I guess you liked Fahd’s story about the wives of the Prophet,” Rose said teasingly.

“Yes, I remembered you telling me Fahd’s story about the Prophet’s (pbuh) wives during the week I was gone on vacation for Spring Break. I told my teacher when she asked for ideas for our play, and she and my class thought telling the story was exactly right for us Muslimahs!” Camelia replied as she grinned from ear to ear at her friend.

“I’m happy to be of help. Just ask Rose!” Rose paused and took a know-it-all posture.

Camelia lightly punched her friend’s shoulder and stuck her tongue out at her before quickly getting a serious look on her face. “Rose, I have something special to ask, so think first before answering.” Camelia looked very serious. Rose was about ready to make a silly face at her friend, but immediately gave her full attention to Camelia when she heard her serious tone of voice.

“In a couple of days, Reyhannah’s parents are going to move to a new house in our city. Reyhannah will be going to our school and the same middle school we will go to next year. She is going to be living in Ruby’s neighborhood, too! I want to ask Reyhannah to join us as a Hijab-Ez. What do you think about this idea?” Camelia looked anxiously at Rose. After all, the Hijab-Ez had been Rose’s idea.

“You really are soo...silly to be worried that I wouldn’t want Reyhannah to join us,” Rose gently chided her friend. “Of course, she can join us! I know Ruby and Christina will want her in the Hijab-Ez. Look at them walking up ahead of us. Already they are linking their arms with each other, and Christina is gabbing a mile a minute!”

“I told Reyhannah about us Hijab-Ez, and she thinks we are the cat’s meow!”

“She likes cats, too!” exclaimed Rose.

“Reyhannah has two cats. They are longhaired, white Persians named See and Saw! See-Saw,” giggled Camelia.

Rose gave a loud whoop when she heard this.

“Reyhannah is always telling me silly jokes. She has a warped sense of humor! Whenever I feel down in the dumps about something, I call Reyhannah, and she ends up making me laugh.”

Talking about the cats made Rose think of Abu. Rose remembered what Fahd had said about God giving people something to replace what they have loved and lost. *I think God is giving me Reyhannah as a new friend to replace my kitty, Abu*, Rose thought as a warm, happy feeling seemed to lift her spirits and she smiled a truly happy smile.

“Look, your mom is waving at us to hurry up. When we go to the restroom to wash up, let’s tell Reyhannah we have made her a Hijab-Ez, and we can teach her our friendship call,” suggested Rose.

“Good idea. She is going to be sooo happy! I told her all about the things we do. She fell down and rolled on the floor laughing when I described the looks on the faces of the girls at school the first day you and Ruby put on your handkerchief head scarves and yelled Hijab-Ez as we walked by their group!”

“Well, she won’t have to worry about trying to make new friends at school because she already has Hijab-Ez friendship. Come on, let’s hurry because your mom is beginning to scowl at us,” Rose urged. The two girls quickened their pace and caught up to Judy as she opened the restaurant door.

“It’s about time, you two slowpokes!” exclaimed Judy. “The other girls are in the restroom, so hurry up and wash your hands, and then all of you meet me on the patio. I have reserved a special table for us, and Sylvia is going to be our special server today!”

Judy turned away from the girls as she heard Sylvia call a greeting to her. Judy looked back over her shoulder and said, “Now, don’t stay in there all day. I’m as hungry as a bear, and Sylvia has made a surprise for you girls, so hurry up!”

Rose and Camelia opened the restroom door and were practically knocked down by Christina as she rushed over to them. Christina gushed, “Guess what? Reyhannah’s parents are from India. She has four older brothers and is the ‘baby’ in her family. She has two cats named See and Saw! She is going to go to our school and...”

Ruby interrupted Christina’s steamroller diatribe and said quietly with a serene smile, “and...she is moving to MY neighborhood! Look what she drew on my hand.” Ruby pointed to the top of her right hand where a daisy was drawn. “Reyhannah said if she had her paints here, she could make it a yellow daisy. She used an eyeliner pencil she got from her mother to draw the flower.” Ruby spoke with deep respect for Reyhannah’s artwork. Ruby was an artist, too. She liked to create beautiful flowers and unusual shapes from intricately folded colored paper, and often decorated her creations with glitter and colored markers.

Rose and Camelia looked at their friends and just grinned in amazement. “What did you do, Christina, give Reyhannah the third degree?” Camelia asked and then giggled.

Christina looked kind of sheepish and shrugged. Ruby spoke up then. “We want to have Reyhannah join the Hijab-Ez. She knows all about us from hearing stories from Camelia.”

“Super-de-duper! Camelia and I were just talking about this outside. Do you want to join the Hijab-Ez?” Rose asked Reyhannah.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” squealed Reyhannah.

The girls quickly formed a circle and raised their right arms with their pinkie fingers extended. In unison they yelled, “Hijab-Ez! Friends forever!” The girls were so excited they laughed out loud, hugged each other, and began talking all at once. They sounded like a group of noisy birds twittering at the same time.

A head poked through the doorway of the restroom. It was Sylvia, owner of the restaurant. “You chattering magpies better hurry, ‘cause Judy says there is going to be nothing left for you to eat but bread crumbs!” The girls rushed towards the doorway as Sylvia stepped aside and held the door for them.

“Do you know Sylvia?” Reyhannah asked Rose.

“Yep, she taught Grandma and me how to cook rice, right here in this restaurant. My grandma used to make rice that looked and tasted like glue!” Rose said and couldn’t help but giggle.

The girls went to the side door of the restaurant, which lead to the patio area. They spied Judy sitting at the head of a long, decorated table, munching on some bread sticks. In the center of the table, dozens of colored balloons streamed from a large red and yellow decorated bowl. A red and white banner was strung up above the table and the words “We Are Proud Of You” were painted on the banner.

“Ruby, Christina, and I made the banner. Ruby drew the red roses on the border, Christina traced and colored the red and silver letters, and I bought the white banner paper,” Rose said to Reyhannah and Camelia.

“Awesome!” Camelia and Reyhannah said together, repeating one of Rose’s favorite expressions.

As the girls took their seats and Sylvia began bringing plates and bowls of food to the table, Camelia leaned towards her mother and whispered, “You were right. My friends really like Reyhannah and now she is a Hijab-Ez!”

Rose sat at the opposite end of the table and looked at Judy and her friends. She couldn’t wait to get home to tell Grandma all about the play and her new Hijab-Ez friend, Reyhannah. Rose decided she would ask Reyhannah for the name of the city in India where her parents lived before moving to the United States. Rose began to plan in her mind her research about India.

“Hey, Rose, stop daydreaming. Christina is going to eat everything—if my mom doesn’t beat her to it—and you won’t get any lunch,” Camelia said jokingly.

“Beep! Beep! Earth to Rose! Earth to Rose! Fast food is fast disappearing,” Reyhannah mimicked in the voice of a robot.

Rose blinked and looked around the table at her friends. She slowly raised her left hand, and in herkie-jerkie motions gradually dropped her arm and hand to her left side, and then promptly sat on her left hand. “Now, I am ready to eat!”

Christina, Ruby, Reyhannah, and Camelia copied Rose’s antics. Judy burst out laughing. “Now that everyone has made sure they will use good manners while eating, can we please eat?”

The week following the play was a busy one for the Hijab-Ez at their school. They introduced Reyhannah to the teachers, and showed her where everything important was located—like their favorite spot next to the building wall where they met each day, the lunchroom where they usually plotted and schemed, the all-important restroom, and the lounge, so Reyhannah could say noon prayer with Camelia. Friday, at lunch, the girls made plans to

meet the next day at Grandma's house. The Hijab-Ez tried to meet every Saturday morning at Grandma's house. This Saturday was going to be "special" according to Rose. She told her friends that a big planning session was needed, but didn't explain any further. Her friends were curious and, knowing Rose, when she said "Big Plans," they decided they better be sure and be at the meeting!