

The Visitors

By

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Introduction—*Islamic Rose Family and Friends*

Rose—Nine-year-old only child, Christian background, mixed ethnicity, USA

Grandma (Linda)—Rose's grandma, police officer, avid gardener, loves crafts, searching for truth about God, doesn't claim any religious affiliation, 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 astronomy

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

Eddie—Rose's twelve-year-old male cousin, lives in Florida

Mike—Rose's ten-year-old male cousin, lives in Florida

Chris—Rose's eight-year-old male cousin, lives in Florida

Chapter 1 – *As-Salaam'Alaykum*

The warm Arizona sunshine streamed through the open window of Rose's bedroom. Fine dust danced merrily in the sunbeams making their way to the bed where she was sleeping. Rose squeezed her eyes tight and pulled the sheet over her head to block out the intruding light. It was Saturday morning, and she didn't want to get up. Saturdays were for sleeping in late and being a little lazy.

Just as Rose began to drift back towards dreamland, the words "Saturday" and "Grandma's visitor" shook her wide awake! Before her feet hit the carpet, she was already mentally running through the questions that had been building up since she first learned a police officer from a foreign country was coming today.

What would he look like? What kind of food did he eat? How am I going to talk to him if he doesn't speak English? Is he going to live at my grandma's house? Will he like me?

Rose paused in her rambling thoughts to reflect on her father's response to the unexpected guest. *Dad didn't seem too excited when he heard about the visitor*, she remembered with some apprehension.

Rose looked at her alarm clock the exact moment it sounded, causing her to squeal, "Oh, no!" It was 9:00 AM, and the visitor could be arriving any time! She quickly dressed in the pants and long-sleeved blouse Grandma had asked her to wear instead of her shorts and tee shirt. She pulled on her scruffy-toed cowgirl boots and dragged a brush through her tangled blonde hair before pulling it into the usual, unremarkable ponytail.

Anxious to go, she rushed into the kitchen, following the tempting smell of frying eggs and buttered toast.

“Good morning, Dad,” Rose said cheerfully, plopping down on the stool next to the counter and watching him as he put a glass of orange juice beside her plate.

“Good morning to you, too, sleepyhead.” Rose’s dad regarded her quizzically with raised eyebrows and a tilt of his head. “What are you doing in those long clothes when it’s already eighty degrees outside?”

Rose took a gulp of orange juice before replying. “Did you forget Grandma’s visitor is coming today and...”

“I don’t know why your grandmother is inviting a stranger to live in her home. And he’s an Arab, too! I don’t want you to have to change your whole life just because this visitor has different customs than we do!” Rose’s dad interrupted crossly.

Rose squirmed on the stool as she watched the deepening frown crease her dad’s forehead. “I don’t mind, Dad. Grandma said it’s a way to show respect, and it will make her visitor feel more comfortable.”

Dad looked at Rose’s upturned face. *She is so earnest and worried.* “I’m sorry, Rose.” He smiled and gave her an awkward pat on the shoulder. “Finish your breakfast and run along to your grandmother’s house. I’m just being an old worry wart.”

Rose munched on a piece of toast, thoughtfully eyeing her dad clean up the clutter he’d made preparing her breakfast. He was a messy cook!

Maybe Dad doesn’t like Arabs because they have bushy beards and dress kinda funny. It isn’t every day in Tempe, Arizona, that you can see someone with a long shirt and scarf thingie on his head. Oops! I hope

he doesn't have a sword like the one I saw in that movie where the British soldiers were fighting the Arabs in the desert and... Rose gave an involuntary shudder as she remembered the battle scene.

I'm just being silly. That was a movie, and the visitor is a police officer. He probably has a gun and he might even be wearing a policeman's uniform. I hope he's not too old. Maybe he'll be tall like my dad. Gosh, Dad's gotta be one of the tallest people anywhere...well, maybe not as tall as the pro basketball players! I must have gotten my shrimp-boat genes from my mom, I guess.

Her mother had left the family when she was only a baby, and Rose didn't have one single memory of her to rely on. She only knew what her dad and grandparents told her about the woman who gave birth to her nine years ago. On the dresser in Rose's bedroom was a picture taken of the two of them in the hospital delivery room, her mom's arms encircling Rose's swaddled little form. Rose missed having a mom, especially when it was so hard to overlook, as on Mother's Day. But then, ever the optimist, Rose always firmly reminded herself she had the best dad in the whole wide world and she lived right next door to her cool grandparents, too!

Ring! Ring!

Startled from her pondering, Rose slid off the stool seat and made a dash for the living room telephone. "I'll get it!" she called over her shoulder.

"Hello, Rose Allen speaking. Sure, just a minute and I'll get him." Rose put the phone receiver down and walked back to the kitchen. "It's for you, Dad. The man said he was Officer Benson."

"Thank you, Rose. Finish your chores, and then you can go on over to Grandma's house, but don't forget we have laundry to do this afternoon."

Rose ducked comically, barely missing her dad's hand as he tried to tug on her ponytail on the way to the living room and his waiting caller. After many years of this trick, she was wise to his ways!

"I won't forget, Dad," Rose promised, adding her dirty plate and glass to the rest of the dishes in the kitchen sink.

In her room, Rose smoothed the comforter over the mattress, smiling to herself at what her dad called this activity. He would pretend to scowl fiercely and ask, "Rose Allen! Did you toss the cover over the wrinkled sheets again?" A wide grin replaced the frown when Rose inevitably and pertly replied, "No, Dad. I did what's called making the bed. Remember? You taught me how!"

Still smiling, Rose went through each room, gathered up the trash baskets, took them outside, and emptied them into the big dumpster sitting on the edge of the carport. She hurried back inside and glanced at the clock on the wall above the sink. *It was almost 10 o'clock!*

"Raspberries!" she exclaimed out loud and picked up her pace. Next on the list was feeding her fish and Joe, her pet turtle. She sprinkled fish-flakes across the open top of the twenty-gallon tank. She had started out by asking for one goldfish two years ago, and now there were at least fifteen little darting critters swimming around in there!

Even over the drone of the filters, she could tell her dad was still on the phone. Rose didn't like the phone when it was for her dad. It was always bad news, which either took her dad back to work or made him busy at home. She knew being a captain at the Arizona Department of Corrections was a tough job that somebody had to do, and she was proud of her dad. She just wished it didn't monopolize so much of his time. Even getting to his job took

time! From their home in Tempe to the rural town of Florence where the prison was situated, it took almost an hour and a half. Why, in that amount of time, she and Grandma could make some yummy cookies, watch them bake, eat them with a glass of chilled milk, and still have minutes to spare!

Poor Dad, Rose thought. I hope it's not another crisis for him to deal with! I really want him to meet Grandma's visitor, too.

Giving her turtle a final rub, Rose headed for the front door. “Bye, Dad. I finished everything,” she called on her way out, returning her dad’s nod with a nod and smile of her own to match.

Stepping outside, she drew in a deep breath. The air was scented so strongly with the orange and grapefruit blossoms on Grandma’s trees that she could almost taste them. Glancing across the street, she saw Mr. Harris weeding his flower garden.

“Hi, Mr. Harris. How are you today?” Rose’s greeting carried across the yards. He mumbled something in return, but gave her a friendly wave. He was known as the “grump” of the neighborhood. When Grandpa explained to her that Mr. Harris’ wife had died and his loneliness made him sad, Rose understood immediately. His grouchiness wasn’t meant for her, or for anyone. He just missed someone he loved dearly. She always made an extra effort to be kind to him and so she waved back with a big smile.

Crossing her own yard, she reached Grandma’s porch in a few seconds flat. She hesitated before twisting the knob, peeking over at Mr. and Mrs. Gleason’s house next door. She was a little disappointed to see they were not outside. The Gleasons were her favorite neighbors. Once, Mr. Gleason made an airplane swing for her when she was three years old.

Now that she was almost ten, she didn't fit inside it anymore, but nesting birds often cooed happily from it during springtime. Rose was a favorite among the mostly retired and older neighbors because she reminded them of their distant grandchildren.

Heading inside the coolness of her grandma's air-conditioned home, Rose called out, "Hello? Where is everybody?"

Her grandma met Rose in the dining room and replied, "My, my! Aren't you the early bird today?" Rose watched as Grandma opened a folded tablecloth and quickly set it on the table. Then Rose grabbed her around the waist and hugged her.

In Rose's typical manner she began firing questions at Grandma. "Can I help you with anything, Grandma? What time will the visitor get here? Do you want me to do something?"

Grandma continued to smooth the linen tablecloth across the dining room table as she watched Rose build up steam for even more queries.

Raising her hands in an I-give-up gesture, Grandma said, "You can help me when you're done answering *my* questions! Did you have breakfast? Did you brush your teeth afterwards? Did you do your chores already?" Grandma perfectly imitated the staccato style of her granddaughter.

Rose ticked off the points on her fingers. "Yep, I ate eggs and toast for breakfast. Then Dad got called to the phone and was still talking when I left. Yep, did my chores. And yep." Here Rose paused and shook her head back and forth. "I didn't brush my teeth."

Grandma gave her the *look* that meant "what are you waiting for?"

Rose scooted down the hallway to the guest bathroom and the spare toothbrush belonging to her. Flipping on the light switch, she kept chattering away. "Afterwards, I'll go out

back and feed my cat friends and say hello to them. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot! Where's Grandpa?"

Checking her watch, Grandma answered, "I sent him to the market for some sweet bread and he should be home in a few minutes."

Just as Rose opened up her mouth, still filled with toothpaste, to complain about being left behind, Grandma shushed her with, "Don't pout because he didn't wait for you. What if our visitor arrived, and you were out shopping?"

Gee, whiz. Grandma is such a stickler for details. She thinks of almost everything! Rose thought as she rinsed the yucky toothpaste out of her mouth and tossed the paper cup in the wastebasket. She headed towards the kitchen and then out the back door where she was promptly and affectionately greeted by three smiling sets of whiskers belonging to Midnight, Cappy and Taffy.

"Guess what?" Rose beamed down at her feline friends. "Today is a Special Day!"

Midnight purred and twisted between Rose's legs as she bent to scratch her ears. Cappy and Taffy purred their desire for individual attention, too. Each one had a special place in Rose's heart. Grandpa called Rose "The Stray Cat Magnet" because all three of her little friends had been homeless and wandering when they found Rose and decided to stay.

Rose loved her animals and she told everybody who would listen that she wanted to be a veterinarian when she grew up. In the meantime, she had plenty of opportunity to practice taking care of her own personal zoo, which consisted of three cats, Joe the Turtle, dozens of fish, and last but not least, her dog, Misty. Just as Rose opened the shed door on Grandma's patio where the cat food was kept, Misty barked a friendly Hello. Even from the doghouse in

Rose's backyard, Misty could sense whenever Rose was nearby and Misty always barked a warm greeting or two.

Done feeding her cats, Rose entered the house to hear Grandma calling over the noise of the slamming door, "Would you please empty all the wastebaskets for me?"

"I'll do it right away, Grandma!"

When Rose finished this task, she climbed into her favorite chair in the family room and pulled out the piece of paper stuffed into her pants pocket from the night before. Written in her scrawling handwriting were the words "*As-Salaam'Alaykum*," which Grandma said was the Muslim greeting meaning "peace be to you." Rose had been diligently practicing these words all week without letting her grandma in on the secret. She wanted to say them to their visitor because he didn't speak English. *I sure hope I say the words right*, Rose murmured, mouthing the phrase yet again. Hearing footsteps, she quickly folded the paper and slipped it back into her pocket right as Grandma came into the family room.

"Well, I think we are ready. The spare bedroom is nice and clean, fresh sheets are on the bed, and the adjoining bathroom is spic and span." Grandma always said this when everything was where it belonged.

Rose stared anxiously at the wall clock above the fireplace mantel. Only five minutes had passed since she last glanced at it. "What time will he get here?"

Grandma just smiled and said, "Soon."

Rose went to the couch, parted the curtains, and began "The Visitor Watch." Every vehicle that drove by made Rose's heart skip a beat. She kept hoping the next car would be the one bringing their visitor.

Grandma shook her head at Rose's impatience. "Come sit with me and play a game of Scrabble. I think the curtains need a rest!"

Scrabble was Rose's favorite game because she and Grandma didn't play by the rules merely seeking to win. Instead, they worked together to make words from all the letters. A round was officially over when there were no more pieces left in the box or on their stands. Rose was proud of the fact that she and Grandma had always used every single tile in their games so far!

She had just finished spelling out one of her favorite words, C-A-T-S, when the doorbell rang. Jumping up excitedly, she raced ahead of Grandma, who called out to her, "Slow down, Rose! We can get the door together."

Rose stood shyly beside Grandma, who opened the door to two men, one older and taller than the other. The younger man's hair and eye color was dark brown, and his skin was the color of coffee with cream in it. He wore a pair of black-rimmed glasses and a friendly smile. Rose was a little disappointed because both men had on regular shirts and pants. *Where are their robes? They aren't dressed like Arabs! No beards? Yeah, but no swords, either, thank goodness! You know, they look like my grandpa,* Rose thought in amazement.

Her grandpa also had dark features due to his Mexican-American heritage. Grandpa and his parents were born in the USA, but their ancestors had been originally from Mexico. Grandpa proudly spoke English and Spanish, but mostly English to Rose.

The older man introduced himself as the interpreter from the university. He told Grandma he would be helping with paperwork until Abdulrahman got settled and learned to speak some English.

Abdulraham? Rose tried saying the name softly, but her tongue got twisted on the L-sound. Rose smiled bashfully and watched both men follow Grandma into the family room.

When everyone sat down, the smiling interpreter formally introduced their visitor. “Please meet Abdulraham. He is happy to be invited to your home to meet you.”

Oh, boy! Now is my chance. I hope I don't mess it up! Rose looked at Abdulraham, took a big breath, and said, “As-Salaam’Alaykum.”

The young man appeared momentarily startled, and then a warm smile lit up his features. “*Wa’alaykum as-Salaam.*”

Hey! I did it! I spoke to him in his language of Arabic! This is fun, Rose thought. She switched to English and offered, “Peace to you, too!”

Rose reveled in triumph at the interpreter’s approving nod and Grandma’s look of surprise. Rose wasn’t the only one with a surprise, however. After an exchange of words between Abdulraham and his companion, Abdulraham spoke his first words in English. “And to you be peace” (Wa’alaykum as-Salaam).

Abdulraham had been studying this phrase for weeks, just like Rose! When she heard this, she knew she was going to like spending time with Grandma’s visitor. Right then and there, she made up her mind she was going to find a way to help him learn English.

Rose motioned to Abdulraham to follow her. She toured him around the living arrangements prepared for him in case he decided to move to Grandma’s house. In the bedroom, Abdulraham pointed to himself, and said, “Abdul.”

She returned the gesture by indicating her own self. “Rose.”

A questioning look filled Abdul's eyes. Rose's eyes, however, had already spied a helpful tool to erase the confusion of this new word. She went to a vase Grandma had set on the center of the dresser and withdrew a single, long stemmed flower. Pointing to it and then back to herself, she repeated the word "Rose."

Understanding lit up Abdul's face as he said, "*Warda!*" and then, "Rose!" She clapped her hands in delight at having just taught the visitor an English word!

Another thought popped into her quicksilver mind, *Hey! I just learned my name in Arabic!*

Grandma called out, "Rose, bring Abdulraham back to the family room."

As they headed to the front of the house, a door slammed, and Grandpa's voice filled the air. "Hello, I'm home!" He joined everyone in the family room after placing a package on the table. Introductions were made all around, and the adults soon fell into deep conversation.

Rose sat silently swinging her left leg back and forth and sneaking quick glances at Abdul. Grandma said it wasn't nice to stare, but it sure was hard not to! Her ears perked up when she heard the interpreter say Abdul would be living in the United States for a whole year to study English at the university and attend six months of training with the Phoenix Police Department. *Hmm...I wonder why Abdul is going to police school again,* Rose thought with the edge of her curiosity beginning to mount. Abdul was in the same line of work as her grandparents. Grandma was a police sergeant and worked for the state police department. Grandpa had retired as a police sergeant before Rose had been born, and now he worked for a local hotel as a security supervisor in the evenings.

Rose grew tired of silently listening to the adults talk about class schedules and transportation for Abdul. Rose noticed Abdul was sitting just as quietly, watching the talk, but

not participating because it was all in English. *I think he must be bored, too! I bet he'd like to meet my cats.*

Rose decided to speak up for both of them. “Can I take Abdul outside to meet my cat friends?”

The interpreter turned to Abdul and said something to him in Arabic. Abdul nodded his head at Rose and accepted her outstretched hand.

Leading him outside, Rose stopped at the doorway to the patio. Very slowly, she said the word “door” and pointed. *I wonder if he understands. Let me try again.* “This is a door.” Rose said the word “door” loudly and touched it.

Catching on, Abdul touched the door and repeated the word “door.” He gave Rose a wide grin when she smiled and clapped her hands in approval.

Wow! This is really going to work! I can help teach Abdul English!

Rose got so excited she yelled out, “Awesome!”

Abdul raised his eyebrows and grinned and then tried this new word. It came out “Wasome,” and he tried again. The second time he said the word correctly!

This brought a chuckle and a nod of the head from Rose. She pointed to her mouth, placed her fingers at each corner, and stretched a big grin across her face. “Awesome!”

Abdul laughed out loud and copied her antics. “Awesome!” he said with gusto, to her great amusement.

On the patio, Rose introduced her cat friends. “Please meet Midnight, Cappy and Taffy.” Placing a furry bundle in his arms, Rose said, “Cat.” Confident in this learning approach, Abdul stroked the soft ears, and said, “Cat.”

Rose grabbed Abdul's hand and began walking around the backyard, being careful to steer clear of the swimming pool. She pointed and named objects, waiting for Abdul to follow suit. She could have done this all day, but the back door opened, and Grandma stuck her head out. "Your dad called. He says it's time for you to go have lunch."

Rose frowned. "But we're having fun, and Abdul is learning so many new words. I want to stay and keep teaching him!"

Grandma's voice was firm. "The interpreter and Abdul must be leaving soon as there is much more to do and discuss before Abdul makes his decision on moving in with us. You can come back this evening after supper. I promise to telephone you if I know anything about Abdul's decision. Now, your grandpa needs to get ready to go to work, so go in and give him a hug goodbye."

Rejoining the others in the family room, Abdul spoke rapid Arabic to his companion. Turning to address Rose, the man said, "Abdul appreciates your help. He thinks you are a very good teacher."

To Rose's amazement, Abdul said in clear English, "Cat," "door," "tree," "sky," "pool," "table," "Rose," and "Awesome!" Grandma raised her eyebrows when she heard the last word, but didn't scold Rose, not this time anyway.

Rose's eyes looked like round saucers and she said gleefully, "Abdul is a learn-o-matic just like me!" Everyone laughed at the comical expression on her face.

Rose hugged Grandpa, Grandma, and, lastly, Abdul before saying goodbye. "See you later, al-li-gator!" she called.

Grandpa answered her with, "After while, croc-o-dile!"

Shutting the door on her way out, Rose crossed the yard and walked to her house. *I hope Abdul wants to live at Grandma's house. I need a PLAN to help teach him English. Please God, let Abdul decide to stay.*

* * *

Arriving home just in time to hear her dad say, “Lunch is ready after you wash your hands,” Rose realized how hungry teaching made her!

“Okay, Dad.” Moments later, she joined him at the dining room table, playfully showing her squeaky-clean palms for his inspection and approval.

Without missing a beat, Rose excitedly told her dad all about the visitor between bites of her peanut butter sandwich and gulps of cold strawberry-flavored milk. He remained silent, but watchful of the evident happiness in his daughter. *Maybe this Arab guy won't be such a bad influence after all. Well, we'll just have to wait and see,* he thought grudgingly.

When lunch and the dishes were equally squared away, Rose made a beeline for the living room recliner and the telephone. Propping her arms on the chair, she put her chin in her hands and stared at the phone.

“What are you doing?” Dad asked as he joined her.

Without moving a muscle, she informed him that her grandma was going to call when she was through talking to the visitors. “I'm waiting to find out if Abdul is going to stay next door with Grandma and Grandpa.”

“If you can make something happen just by looking at it, why don’t you do the same thing with your unmade bed in the mornings?” They both laughed, and Rose settled back to wait. And wait. And wait. It seemed like hours, but finally...*Ring! Ring!* Rose grabbed up the receiver before the third ring. “Hi, Grandma, is Abdul staying?” Her words tumbled out in a rush.

Not wanting to keep her granddaughter in suspense a moment longer, she answered, “Yes, Abdul has decided to stay with us!”

Grandma held the phone away from her ear as a piercing “Neat-O!” was sent across the airwaves. Rose dropped the telephone receiver, tore out of the kitchen door and across the lawn towards Grandma’s house. She couldn’t wait to “talk” with Abdul again. Her joyful run was brought to a screeching halt when she noticed the interpreter’s car was no longer parked in the driveway.

Rose opened the front door and went in search of Grandma. She found her reading in the family room with her feet soaking in a small plastic tub of steaming water. Grandma was on her feet a lot in her job and she said a good foot soaking was one of the best ways to ease tired feet and relax. Rose asked with her disappointment evident in her voice, “Where did Abdul go? I thought he was staying here at your house!”

“Remember, I told you Abdul and his interpreter had errands to do today, but Abdul is going to be moving here next week.” Grandma noticed Rose’s disappointment. “Cheer-up, Rose, the week will go by fast. You and I will be very busy using the computer to find out about the foods Muslims and Arabs like to eat. Next weekend we can go to an Arab market and buy some groceries for Abdul. Do you want to help me?”

“Do I want to help? You bet I do, Grandma.” Rose thought, *imagine that! I didn't know there was an Arab market in my city!* “Do you know how to find the Arab market, Grandma?”

Grandma replied, “Rose, there are several Middle Eastern or Arab markets in Tempe, and there are also many Arabs and Muslims living in our city.”

The expression on Rose's face clearly showed she was very surprised to hear this. “Why haven't we ever seen any? Maybe we'll see some when we go shopping?” Rose was amazed as today was the first time she had met an Arab or a Muslim, and Abdul was both! *So, he's a Muslim...but what does that mean?*

Before Rose could ask, she heard her grandma say something even more interesting. “Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs.”

Rose squinted thoughtfully. “Grandma, what is the difference between being an Arab and being a Muslim? You just said that Abdul is both.”

“I think we've been watching too much television for our understanding of this subject,” Grandma said. “Muslims practice a religion called *Islam*. Muslims live on every continent in the world. There are Chinese Muslims, Indian Muslims, American Muslims, Latin Muslims, African Muslims, and, of course, Arab Muslims. However, just because you are an Arab doesn't mean you're automatically a Muslim. There are Arab Christians, Arab Jews, Arab Buddhists, you name it!” Continuing this thread, Grandma went on, “Arabs usually live in the Middle East and are recognized by their culture and traditions. Most Arabs are Muslim, so this may be why so many people in Western countries misunderstand and think all Muslims are Arabs.”

Rose digested this new piece of information for a moment. “It’s like Christians being part of a religion and also living in many different countries. The Christians have different cultures, too.”

“Yes, Rose, I think both of us are beginning to understand a little more,” Grandma replied.

Rose smiled, proud she had figured this out by herself. “But, how does a person become a Muslim?”

“That is a good question! I don’t know. Maybe we can ask Abdul when he learns a little more English.”

Rose’s quicksilver mind changed gears, and she asked with a hint of excitement, “What time are we going to the Arab market? Do you know what kind of food to buy? Can you pronounce the Arabic names of the food?”

“I haven’t figured everything out yet, but I’m sure by Friday I’ll come up with some helpful information. I can always call the interpreter if I don’t find any reliable sources on the Internet,” replied Grandma.

While Grandma went to the kitchen to get supper started, Rose continued sitting in the family room. Questions tumbled over each other by themselves as no answers could be found to keep them company in her jumbled thoughts. Suddenly an idea flashed bright! She quickly got up and went to Grandma’s desk where she took out a big writing tablet from the drawer. She hurried off to her study-playroom, which was always ready for her whenever she needed to stay at Grandma’s house.

Rose loved to spend time in her study-playroom, even if it was just a bit crowded and sometimes messy. Dad said she had too much stuff. *But, how could any kid have too much stuff?* Rose wondered. Rose had a small, brown, battered desk that she used for doing her homework. Dad promised he would get her a new one, soon. Her twin bed was covered with stuffed animals of every size, color and description. Grandma said it was a big pain to take them off and put them back on when Rose stayed overnight. Rose would shake her head at Grandma and say there was no way she could part with any of her friends.

Rose was a bookworm like Grandma, and, for now, all her books were in boxes stored underneath her bed and out of sight. Her walls were covered with pictures of animals, and her corkboard was filled with ribbons, newspaper articles, postcards, and even photos of her school friends. In one corner was a calendar where Rose kept track of her important stuff.

Rose had a curio cabinet, but no pretty knick-knacks were sitting on the shelves. Instead, cookie tins full of her rock collection took up space on every shelf. Rose loved to collect rocks, and Grandma gave her cookie tins to store all her treasures. Rose reserved one corner of her room for her scooter, bicycle helmet, softball and glove, and her Frisbees. Rose wanted a soccer ball, but didn't know how to play the game. Rose's small, four-drawer dresser was filled with play and night clothes, which often could be seen hanging out of partially closed drawers. Most of her clothes were at her own house. Dad said her room at home was as cluttered as her study-playroom at Grandma's. Rose and Grandma had an electric train and a whole village set up on a white board, but it was underneath Grandma's bed. There wasn't any space for it in Rose's room.

Sitting at her desk, Rose scribbled on the large tablet the words “Rose’s Arab-Muslim Journal, Page 1.” After a moment’s hesitation, she quickly scratched through this and wrote instead, “Dear Diary.” She stared at the words, and then drew a line through them, too. *Boy, this is messy!* After tearing off the page, Rose began to write again with:

Dear Journal,

This is my first time writing in you and I want you to have a good name. How about ... Dear JAMS? No! Not the fruit spread, silly! The letters of your name stand for ‘J’ournal of ‘A’rab ‘M’uslim ‘S’tuff! Do you like it? For fun, I’ll call you Jammie, because all of my friends have nicknames for each other.

Now that I’ve got you a good name, I can tell you about my other new friend. Oh, Jammie! I was so excited to meet Grandma’s visitor! I can’t pronounce his full name yet, so he just said to call him Abdul. Guess what? He told me my name in Arabic is Warda! Neat, huh? I learned that Abdul is an Arab and a Muslim. I bet you didn’t know Muslims practice a religion called Islam. Guess what I did? I taught Abdul some English words. He is a learn-omatic just like me! Right away he said the words correctly and then remembered them. Oh, except for one...he didn’t say “Awesome” correct the first time. He said “wasome”! That’s okay, because I think I said the Muslim greeting wrong, too!

I'm having so much fun learning new things, I have to write it all down and I promise to "talk" to you every day! Hmm...I think I'll need to put some explanations of the Arabic words I am gonna learn so you can understand me. After all, I don't think you speak Arabic, do you, Jammie? I better make a study list and this should help us learn Arabic words. Here's the first list:

Saudi Arabia is an Arab country in the Middle East.

Islam is a religion practiced by Muslims. Grandma says they believe there is only one god and the Arabic name for God is Allah.

Muslim is the name for people who practice the religion of Islam.

Arab means a person from the Arabic culture. Many Arabs live in the Middle East, but some live in other countries, even right here in Tempe, Arizona, USA!

As-Salaam'Alaykum means peace be to you. As-Salaam'Alaykum, Jammie!

Jammie, I want to find out how a person becomes a Muslim, but I have to wait until Abdul learns more English. I can't wait! I think I need to make a PLAN to speed up Abdul's learning (giggle). Learning one word at a time is fun, but awfully slow. I am gonna have to think about this some more.

Okay, Jammie. I'm being called to supper. Sounds like Dad's here. I can hear him talking to Grandma. We're eating at Grandma's house tonight.

Oh, dear, I almost forgot something very important! Next week, Grandma and I are going shopping for food in an Arabic market. Yep, it should be loads of fun, especially with us trying to pronounce the Arabic names for the food!

*More later!
Love, Rose*

After Rose carefully put her journal away in her desk drawer, she went to the kitchen to help set the dinner table. Carrying the plates, Rose stopped to whisper to Grandma, “I have a new friend!”

“You mean Abdul? I think he will be a nice friend for all of us,” Grandma whispered back.

Rose shook her head. “No, Grandma! My new friend is Jammie. She’s my new journal, and I’m telling her everything I learn about Abdul, Muslims, and Arabs!”

Grandma smiled, “Wow, two new friends in one day!”

* * *

Later that evening, Rose and Grandma decided to make Grandpa’s favorite dessert, Bread Pudding.

“I’ll read the recipe, and you get the ingredients ready, okay?” Rose sat on the large, three-legged stool at the end of the kitchen counter, balancing Grandma’s huge recipe book on her knees.

Grandma went to the pantry and said, “I’m ready. Fire away!”

Before long, Grandma and Rose were elbow-deep in bread, milk, spices, and mixing bowls. After the pudding was safely placed in the oven to bake, Rose put the recipe book away and went to the sink to wash her hands, just as Dad came into the kitchen.

“It’s getting late, and you have to get up early for church. I think you’ll have to eat the bread pudding for dessert tomorrow after lunch,” he said to Rose, sweeping her long bangs to the side, away from her eyes. Rose brought up her right arm and brushed away the few errant strands her dad had missed. Letting her bangs grow longer was a good idea, but wisps always seemed to escape from the barrettes and clips Grandma used to keep them off her face.

“I’ll be home as soon as we finish cleaning up our mess, okay?”

“Okay. And, Rose, you must remember we are Christians and not Muslims. Just because Abdul is going to live here at Grandma and Grandpa’s house doesn’t mean you are going to be acting like a Muslim. Is that clear?” Rose nodded her head slowly, but her face mirrored hurt and confusion. *Why is my dad so upset? He sounds kinda mad!*

Before she could answer, Grandma said, “Finish drying the dishes, Rose. I need to talk to your dad before he leaves.” Patting Rose’s cheek lightly, she turned and left the kitchen in the wake of her son.

Rose watched them go and silently thanked her grandma for stepping in. *I wonder why Dad is upset about Muslims. He hasn't even met Abdul. Did I say something wrong? Maybe my dad doesn't like Arabs?*

A few minutes later, Grandma returned to the kitchen, and Rose shared her big worry with her. "I just thought of something." Rose put down the dishtowel and pulled anxiously on Grandma's sleeve. "What if my dad doesn't like Abdul?"

Rose's face was the picture of dismay. Her mouth was turned down at the corners, her brow was creased, and her freckled nose was crinkled up, causing her gray-blue eyes to almost disappear in her small face.

"Oh, honey!" exclaimed Grandma. "It isn't that your dad dislikes Abdul. He just doesn't know Abdul. Your dad is always concerned about who you make friends with. We need to give him some time to get used to the idea of Abdul being a guest in our home. Try not to worry about this, okay?"

To Grandma's relief, Rose nodded her head. Rose was still worried. *I can't help but worry. I love my dad so much, but it makes me feel sad that he seems to already dislike Abdul and he doesn't even know him. No sense upsetting Grandma, though. Now I need two PLANS: One PLAN to help Abdul learn English, and another to help my dad get to know Abdul. I'm sure my dad would like Abdul if he only spent some time with all of us together. That's it! Maybe I can get Grandpa to help.*

Ring! Ring!

"I'll get it!" called Rose, as she hurried to the telephone. "Hello, this is Rose Allen speaking."

"So...is my long lost daughter coming home anytime soon?" Rose's dad teased.

“Oh, Daddy, I’m not lost,” giggled Rose. “Grandma and I just finished putting away the dishes.”

“It’s getting late. Give Grandma a hug for me and come on home.”

“Okay, Dad. I’ll be there in a jiffy.”

Rose returned to the kitchen to say goodbye. “Here’s a hug from Dad,” she said, squeezing Grandma hard.

Rose went to her study-playroom and retrieved her new journal friend, Jammie. She had lots to do and she was going to need the help of her friend to keep track of the PLANS!