

FONS



VITAE

AL-GHAZALI

**A Ramadan Gift of
9 Stories for Children
*Too Young to Fast***

A Ramadan Gift

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Please frequent www.ghazalichildren.org for updates,
competitions, meeting one another and much more.

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A Word from the Publisher

Fons Vitae is pleased to share a Ramadan gift from a Ghazali Grandmother who has experienced being a refugee. She has written encouraging stories for children still “Too Young to Fast,” who live in countries around our world. These stories not only help introduce our young to their global brothers and sisters, but illustrate their common concerns and discoveries in an entertaining way.

Some of the topics explored are the values of patience, recitation and the study of the Qur’an, as well as the inner fast of the eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet – which small children *can* do. Below, we have included a few passages from Ghazali’s *The Mysteries of Fasting for Children*.

* * *

Imam al-Ghazali explains that just as the Ka’ba, and the sacred sanctuary that surrounds it, are especially honored by God ﷻ even though the whole earth is sacred and belongs to Him, fasting is special to God ﷻ among all the ways we are asked to worship.

* * *

“God says, *The patient ones shall be granted their reward without measure* (39:10). That means a vast reward! And the Prophet ﷺ said that half of fasting is made up of patience. So, fasting teaches us patience, and that happens inside our Hearts. We can’t *see* patience. It’s hidden and invisible.”

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Abid added, “Children like me, who are still too young to fast the whole day, can fast half days. I can fast from lunch until sunset!

“It’s easier to spend time with friends who are content with whatever is happening – not like kids and adults who are always stressed and worried. My Grandma sometimes reminds me of the Qur’anic verse, ‘*God is with those who are patient.*’ Besides, since God is taking care of everything, we can trust Him. So, we can be patient and see what *He* has planned for us. No need to worry.”

“All right!” replied Abdullah. “I am going to try to use this whole month as a great chance to practice and think a lot more about patience.”

* * *

“Think about it, children. Through fasting we learn to resist temptation. We develop the patience and self-control to give up food and drink for part of a day. After Ramadan, that self-control makes us stronger and more able to resist things that are low or forbidden. It makes it easier to stay away from things that God ﷻ doesn’t like.”

* * *

“Some important *sunnas* are:

1. “To recite and study the Qur’an. It’s recommended to recite one part (*juz*’) – one thirtieth of the Qur’an every day. That way we will finish reading God’s Book once during this month of fasting.
2. We can also go to the special *tarawih* prayers at the

A Word from the Publisher

mosque. In some mosques, the imam recites a *hizb* (one-sixtieth) of the Qur'an during the prayers each evening."

Fatima said, "I can recite half a *juz* each day – a *hizb*. It takes me a half hour. So I'll try to read through half of the Qur'an in Ramadan, *inshAllah*."

* * *

Haj Abdullah beamed with joy at Abid's understanding. Abid was learning what truly matters. "Yes," he continued, "life is really only a spiritual journey. And the six inner practices with the different parts of our bodies which the virtuous people (*al-salihin*) do, can help us all along the Way. Since you are young, this is the *perfect* time to begin to practice what the special people of the second group do: the inner fasting of the eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet.

"Remember, children, how in prayer you learned to lower your gaze? We do that so we won't be distracted from being present before God ﷻ. In the same way, we must be careful not to let our eyes look at anything that may take us far from God."

Layla piped up, "The mouth can really say bad things which hurt other people's feelings. Things like lying, backbiting, and slander – what about these?"

"Yes, Layla," confirmed Haj Abdullah. "These three things *all* break the inner fast. Also, swearing a false oath against someone is a sin of the tongue. The tongue needs to fast along with the rest of the body. It would be better to be silent, repeating God's names or reciting the Qur'an. The Prophet ﷺ said that fasting is like a protective shield. We shouldn't say low

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things or be foolish. If someone wishes to pick a fight with you or speaks badly, you must say, ‘I am fasting’” (Bukhari, Muslim).

* * *

“What things can you children *avoid doing* that will keep your tongues from breaking your precious inner fast?”

Khalid exclaimed, “No more bragging or arguing! We learned why those things are wrong in Imam al-Ghazali’s *Book of Knowledge*.”

Maha added, “Well, we shouldn’t gossip either, or say mean things! There is way too much of that. And we shouldn’t only stop this bad speech when we are fasting; we should never, ever do it. Those bad habits are way below our *dignity*!”

* * *

Sitting in the sun’s golden rays, surrounded by the garden birds and other animals who seemed to be listening as well, the children could imagine how their shining eyes and ears could so easily get dirty. They were *too* honorable to let that happen to them! They would *really* try to do the inner fast of the eyes, ears and tongue.

Uthman spoke up, “So, what’s the fourth practice? I guess it must be what we do with our hands and feet! Already, during *wudu*, as we wash our hands, we ask God ﷻ to forgive us for things we wish we hadn’t *done*, and as we wash our feet, to guide us to what pleases Him. We want our feet to carry us to *good* places that we can be proud of.”



Chapter 1 – China

My name is Ma Huan and I am from China. My father and his father and our grandfathers have been Muslim all the way back hundreds of years.

My cousin Cheng lives in a faraway city and he cannot go to the masjid until he is eighteen. Children in China are not allowed to pray *jum'ah* or *taraweeh*. But I am lucky. I go to a Muslim school and I learn Quran and Arabic letters along with my Chinese. In kindergarten, I was chosen to be the Imam of my classmates when the parents were invited to watch us pray. Cheng loves to come visit us. I have two older sisters but he lives in the city and is an only child. When he comes to our village he goes with us to the masjid and we have a lot of fun together.

This Ramadan, Cheng will spend many days with us because Ramadan will come during our vacation. I am so excited to have him come over. His parents will join us at Eid. The first day of fasting, before dawn when it is still like night, we wake up for *suhoor* and we are so sleepy. But the thought of joining the grownups at night wakes us up. Mother has the door to the courtyard open; it looks so dark and scary outside. A dog barks in the distance, and we are so very excited that we forget to be quiet in front of my father and grandmother. My mother looks at me and raises her eyebrows, my sister nudges me with her elbow but I can't help it. Cheng and I try to stop but every time we look at each other, we begin to laugh. After we brush our teeth, we can barely stay awake

Chapter 1 – China

long enough for everyone to make wudu. Father leads us in *fajr* and then we go back to sleep.

I wake up thirsty in the morning. My sisters are dressed already and I must help them. Cheng wants to come along so together we do the weeding and watering of the vegetable garden. We wear broad hats from the sun. Cheng's hands are not used to this work and they soon turn red. I show him how to pull the weeds from the bottom so the roots come out and it doesn't hurt. We wash our dirty hands and then we make *wudu* and go in to pray *Asr*. After that we rest a little; we are hungry and hot and tired. Cheng tells me funny stories about his school and I show him what we have begun to study in math.

Mother has begun to cook and my sisters are washing the stone floor of the courtyard with water. One hour before maghrib, my father comes back from the fields where he supervises and helps the workers in the rice paddies. After he changes his clothes, he sits in a padded bamboo chair in the courtyard and asks each of us to read to him a page of Quran. My sisters read from Sura al-Baqara, I read from Sura al-Kahf in the middle of the Quran and Cheng's page is from Juz' Amma. A nice breeze cools our foreheads and moves the grape vine's leaves making them flutter. But the clusters of grape look like glass and are too heavy to move. Soon they will be ripe enough to eat.

The delicious smell of my favorite soup and dumplings tickles my nose. On a low table, my older sister has prepared a large round plate of cut fruit. To drink there is water and a cold drink made of fruit syrup and for my Grandmother there is tea. My Grandmother is an *Ahong*. A *Nu Ahong* is like an Imam that is

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a lady. She teaches women and children about Islam and she leads them sometimes in prayer. My Grandmother taught all of us Quran and our Arabic letters. She studied many years ago in a Muslim country. She even has been on Haj. My grandmother makes the *dua* of fasting and then we drink and drink and eat.

My father and I clear the table and put the food away while my mother and younger sister do the dishes. It is always a rush after Maghrib; my older sister helps my grandmother change her clothes and get ready for *taraweeh* while Cheng and I carry two clean blankets to the carriage. We spread them on the bottom and everyone climbs into the open carriage. My grandmother and mother sit up front next to my father. It is a short ride to the masjid along a narrow street lined with tall trees. The trees wave their silver lined leaves at us and bend their tall tops as we pass. We hear the clop-clop of other horse carriages bringing people to prayer. Next to the main masjid is the *nu si* or woman's *masjid* hall where my grandmother teaches. My father tells Grandmother that he will send me to let her know when the lesson after prayer is finished. She tells him not to worry because she also has a *fiqh* class to teach.

The prayer is long. I am happy to race Cheng to where my grandmother has just finished teaching. There are many women surrounding her. They nod to her in respect, as she passes by them. She seems so important here, almost like a stranger. through my hair, she is simply my grandmother handing Cheng and me homemade Ramadan sweets from her bag!



Chapter 2 – USA

My name is Ameer Parker. My Daddy takes me to Jumah sometimes, and my Momma takes me to Sunday classes at the Masjid. Sometimes I get sad that we don't have a Christmas tree like Grandma K.

Sometimes I wish I could go trick o'treating with my cousins. Sometimes I feel we Muslims don't have lots of special days. But then! I remember that we have a whole month that is special; it's called Ramadan!

Last year, I remember Momma had several headaches, so Yaseen and I had to be careful not to yell. And twice Daddy came home so tired that he went to sleep, and we had to be careful our playing didn't wake him. But mostly, I like Ramadan. Let me tell you what I like best about Ramadan.

I like *suhoor*! Waking up at night to eat and watching my brother Yaseen doze off into his food.

I like Quran time! Memorizing and reviewing Surahs so I can catch up with my brother – and maybe beat him, too!

I like going shopping with Momma because I get to pick my favorite dessert almost every day.

I like opening my bank. My mother and I count all my money, and I give some of it to the people that need it more than me.

I like having friends over for iftar and moving all the furniture around so that there is room for all of us to pray *taraweeh*.

I like quiet time, sitting in my room with Dad and figuring out

Chapter 2 – USA

when all the different Muslims around the world are making their iftar.

I like going for *taraweeh* at the main masjid and meeting my friends when it is way past our bedtime and then getting ice cream on the way home.

I like to think about all the good deeds we get, *inshaAllah*, by being kind, not fighting, and not arguing; but most of all for fasting in Ramadan.

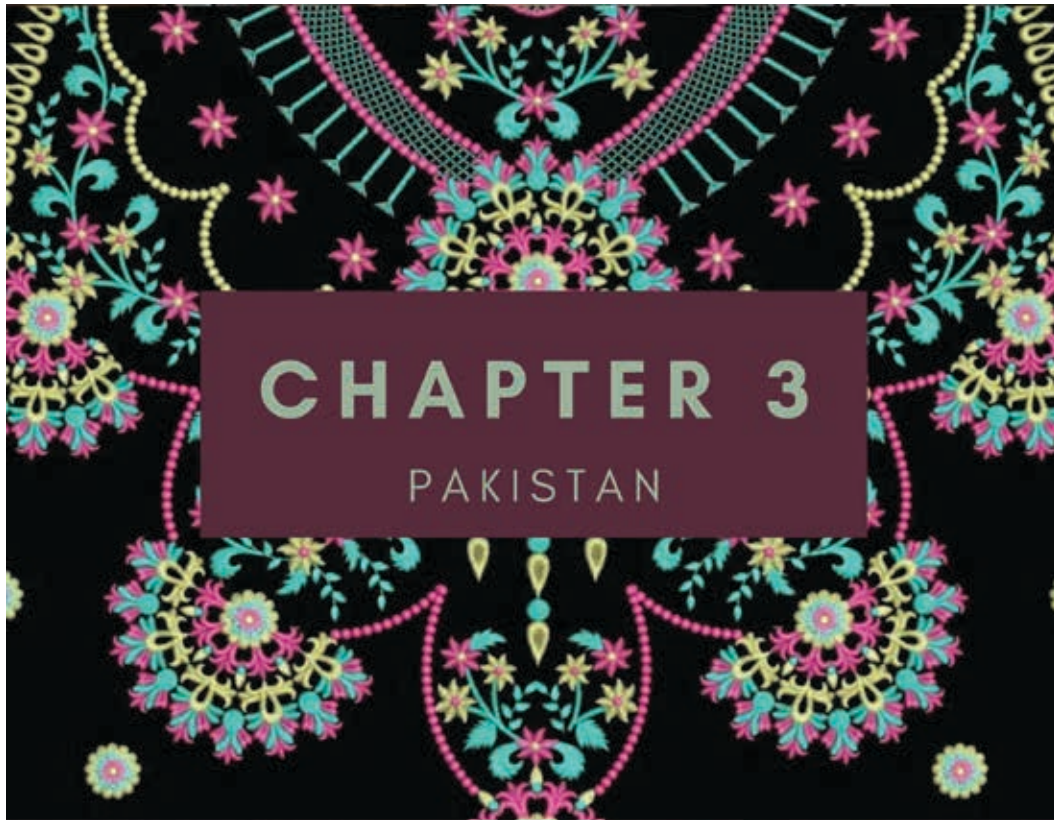
Do you know when my favorite time of day is in Ramadan?

It's when I've made it through the whole day, and I say, 'Thank you Allah for helping me' and it's time to EAT! Yes, I think that's what I like best!

Oh, but there's one more thing that I really like about Ramadan. Can you guess what it is?

It's the praying and the laughing and the games and the visiting and the picnicking and the new clothes and the happiness that happen at the end of Ramadan because now it is: Eid!

Momma says people are celebrating because they are so happy that God has given them one more Ramadan and has helped them fast and pray and read Quran and get lots of good deeds – again!



Chapter 3 – Pakistan

Ahmad loved the Bismillah party his family held for him when he was four years, four months and four days old. He was excited about learning the Arabic letters, and he loved the idea of being old enough to learn how to read Quran. Ahmad loved putting on his fancy clothes, his prayer cap, and praying next to Abu. He loved going with Abu to the Friday prayer and giving coins to the beggars lined up outside the masjid and then buying fruit and sweets together on the way home. But Ahmad did not love Ramadan.

Ramadan meant no family breakfast and sometimes he had to nag his sisters to make him a sandwich at noon, unless he was lucky and had samosas left over from iftar. Ramadan meant everyone was busy working, cooking, reading Quran, and no one had time to play with him or take him to see his cousins. Ramadan meant there was at least one person asleep at all times, and that meant he was always being told, “Don’t shout,” “Play quietly,” and “Not now! It’s Ramadan.”

It was no fun being the youngest and the only boy. Basketball practice had closed down for the month of fasting, there was no school and all his sisters were acting mean. “Jaan, don’t eat in front of me!” “Ahmad, stop riding that creaky tricycle!” “The TV is too loud, love,” and on and on. It was no fun being too young to fast and not being allowed to do his regular activities, either.

Every day was the same: Aisha memorizing Quran in all her spare time, Ameenah helping Mama with the cooking and try-

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ing to complete two *khatems*, and the twins, Sarah and Asra, doing something together. Today they are preparing packages of food and clothes for the poor. That looks like fun – piles and piles of dresses and pants and shirts, big containers of lentils, rice, and sugar, bags to pour them into, and boxes to hold each family's portions.

“Can I help pour?” “Can I fold?” “Can I hold the bag while you pour?” Ahmad begged. His sisters let him help for a while, but then they stop him when he puts two bags of sugar in one box and no rice.

“What if they drink a lot of tea and they need extra sugar?” he exclaimed. “Who cares about rice anyway?”

On the tenth day of Ramadan, Ahmad went with his father to Friday prayer. It was hot and he was thirsty, but he remembered it was not polite to drink in front of those who are fasting. He listened to the Imam saying that Ramadan was the best month of the whole year. Then the Imam began to explain that fasting did not only mean to stop from eating and drinking all day. He said that everyone's eyes, tongue, hands, and feet should fast, too. He said that the eyes, tongue, hands, and feet should fast, even if the person was too old, too young, or too sick to fast from eating and drinking. Ahmad almost laughed. He looked up at Abu. Abu was not smiling. He did not think it was funny. Ahmad imagined a mouth on his hands and feet. He imagined his eyes blinking, ‘Sorry, we are fasting, we can't eat!’

Outside, as they put on their shoes, Ahmad asked, “Abu, why did the Imam say that our hands, feet, eyes and tongue should fast? My hand doesn't have a mouth!” he held up his hand to Abu and giggled. “What do eyes eat, Abu? Eye

Chapter 3 – Pakistan

food?” Abu laughed.

“Fasting is about much more than just not eating and drinking,” he explained. “Your eyes should fast from looking at anything they should not look at. Your tongue should fast from saying anything you shouldn’t say. That is why Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said,

“When it is the fasting day of one of you, let him not shout or be rude, and if someone says bad words to him let him answer, ‘I am fasting’.”

“So, what do you think your hands should not do?” Abu asked. Ahmad said,

“They shouldn’t hit or push or pinch. And my feet shouldn’t kick, right?” “Right,” said Abu.

The next day, Latifa Aunty, her husband, and children came over for iftar. Ahmad was excited about playing with his favorite cousin, eight-year-old Ali; and he was looking forward to drinking *Rooh afza* at iftar, since they had guests. Soon Ali’s older brothers and their friend came out to watch them play. When they began to tease Ahmad and Ali and take away the ball they were playing with, Ali got ready to fight.

“No, Ali, don’t!” cried Ahmad, “just tell them you are fasting and walk away. Come, I know a better place to play.”

“But Ahmad, I am not fasting today, I only fasted the first day,” said Ali.

“Yes, from food and drink, but I’m talking about fasting from bad words and hitting or kicking. That is the fasting all of us should do and not break.”

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Ali was such a good friend. He listened to Ahmad and did not laugh or make fun of him. Ahmad remembered that the Imam had said that it was a kind of fasting to help someone do good and he wondered if the happy feeling inside, was how people who fasted, felt.

That evening after iftar, Abu led the prayer and Ahmad proudly stood in the first row. He liked to hear Abu's voice in prayer. Everyone was praying a prayer called *taraweeh* that was especially for Ramadan. It was way past bedtime, but he was praying with his family and guests. Up and down, and kneeling and sitting, and doing *sujood*, so many, many times. That night when Ammi tucked Ahmad in and read the *muawathat* as she stroked his head her hands smelling of incense and spice, Ahmad thought about all the special things that happened only in Ramadan.

"Tomorrow we are invited to iftar at your grandfather's," Ammi said.

"Will Ali be coming, too?"

"Of course, and all the other cousins as well. Will we pray *taraweeh* there, too?"

"Well, the men will probably be going to the masjid but the women will pray at home and you and Ali can pray with us as well."

Another night of cousins and staying up late. Ahmad thought about how special tonight felt as he prayed with the grownups. Ramadan really was special. Ahmad felt he was beginning to love Ramadan.



Chapter 4 – USA

Assalmu alaykum. My name is Safiya and I live in America. Now it is Ramadan, and I go to the Islamic Center with Mommy and Daddy for *taraweeh*. I have my own prayer head cover, see? so I can pray, too. Baby Zaid can't pray, mostly he goes to sleep. Sometimes he cries and then I have to go to him and try to make him happy. I can't carry him because he's too big for me. I rock his chair and sing softly to him.

Mommy and Daddy wake up for *suhoor* and then they don't eat or drink all day, but I'm still too little to fast. Mommy said I still can do special things in Ramadan. She said I can learn a new surah and pray with her each time she prays.

Today there was boy standing next to his Mommy while we prayed. When I put my prayer cover on, he pointed at me and laughed. He wasn't praying. He was playing with a small truck. He moved the truck back and forth on the carpet. I prayed next to Mommy. The boy started making faces at me. He opened his mouth and showed all his teeth like a monster. He blinked his eyes and shook his head at me. I looked ahead, because when you pray you don't make faces. When the Imam said, "*Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullah*," I looked him straight in the face and stuck my tongue out at him. He started pointing at me and tattling to his mom. Then, Zaid began to cry. Mommy held my hand, grabbed Zaid's carrier, and we left the prayer area.

So now we are in the play area of the *Masjid*. Two Mommies are talking with their babies in their arms. The babysitter lady

Chapter 4 – USA

is sitting at a round table with paper and crayons and three girls are drawing pictures. “Would you like to draw?” she asks. “No, it’s Ramadan and I would like to pray *taraweeh* with my mommy.” I almost cry, but I don’t cause I’m big and Zaid is little. The babysitter lady comes over and shows me where there is a shelf of books. “Shall I read you a story? Here is a book about all the things children can do in Ramadan.” “Like fasting and taraweeh?” I replied. “No, like other things you can get reward for in Ramadan,” she answered.

The book is funny and has lots of pictures and when we finish, I say, “I’m ready to draw now.” I draw all kinds of things I can do to make Allah happy in Ramadan:

I draw me and Zaid being quiet ’cause Mommy is sleeping.

I draw me making Zaid happy while Mommy reads Quran.

I draw me putting my toys away after I play.

I draw me praying with Mommy and Daddy at home.

I draw me learning a new surah.

I draw me making cookies with Mommy for after taraweeh.

I draw me not letting Zaid crawl in front of Mommy when she prays.

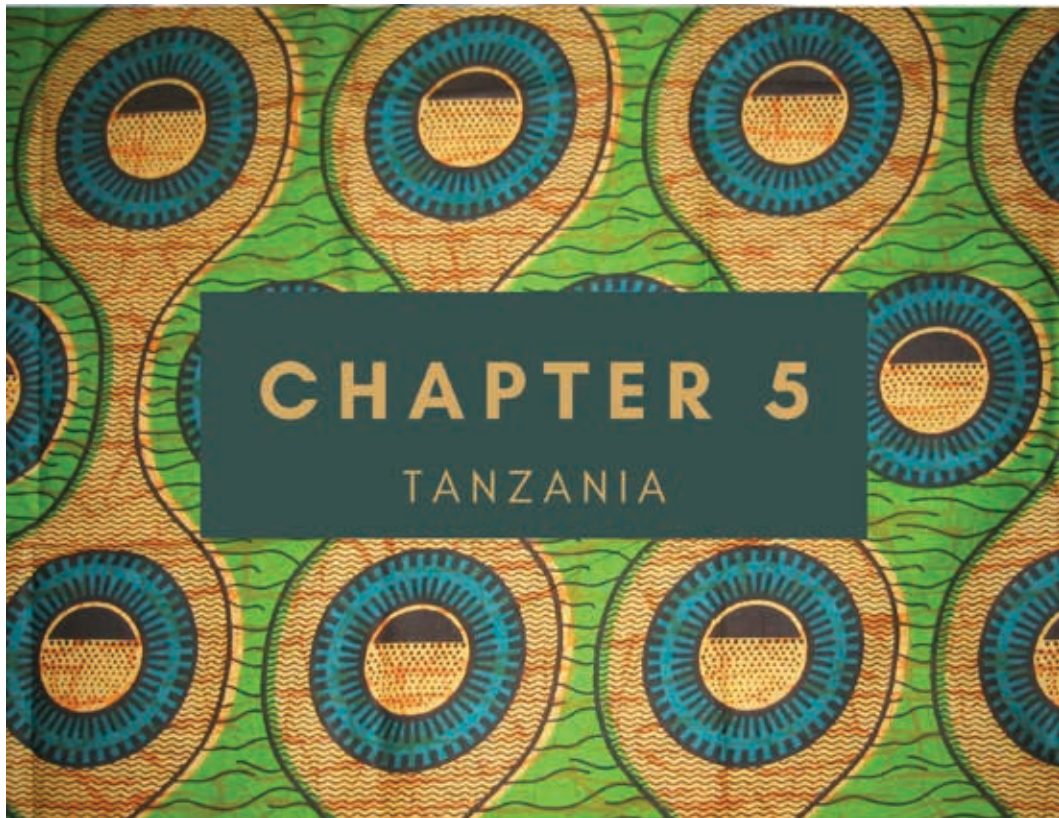
I draw us eating yummy food for iftar.

I draw Daddy taking food to other people who don’t have enough.

I draw me and Mommy in prayer clothes with rainbows on top ’cause we’re happy it’s Ramadan.

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Soon Mommy comes to pick us up. I say, “Mommy did you know there are things I can do in Ramadan other than fasting?” “There are?” she looks surprised. I show her my pictures. I tell her about the story the baby-sitter read to me. I’m excited there are many things I can do in Ramadan.



Chapter 5 – Tanzania

My name is Aalia and I'm from Tanzania.

In Tanzania, wild donkeys have stripes. They are called zebras.



In Tanzania birds have skinny, long legs and pink feathers. They are called flamingoes.



In Tanzania, women wear a colorful cloth called a *khanga*. Muslim women wear one on their heads, too.



In Tanzania, we have a time when the big people stop eating and drinking all day, it's called Ramadan.

My neighbor, Darweesh, who is seven is fasting today and I'm mad. I want to play hunter and gazelle, but he's too tired. I want to play crocodile but his mother doesn't want him going outside in the sun. I would share my squash drink with him, but he can't drink because he is fasting. I tell him, "Fasting is

Chapter 5 – Tanzania

no fun at all.” I leave Darweesh and go off walking.

At first, I am not thinking where I am going. I pick up a branch and hit the long grass as I walk. I wonder if Darweesh will follow me. I glance back. He is not behind me. I keep walking and walking. I walk for a long time; suddenly I see the Cat Woman’s hut. I have walked all the way to the edge of the village! All the children are scared of the Cat Woman. They say she keeps a hundred cats in her home; they say the cats speak to her like people do and that their chief is a one-eyed cat. I think to myself, “I am not afraid of cats”. If I go inside her house, Darweesh will be sorry he did not come with me!

The Cat Woman is outside! She dips a metal bowl into the big clay container of water and drinks. The water looks cold and now I am so thirsty. She shades her eyes and looks at me.

“Do you want a drink?” she asks.

“Yes, please, Grandmother,” I say. The Cat Woman holds out her metal bowl in her shaking hand. I come closer. I take the bowl and I see that her eyes are kind.

The water is cold and good; I am not afraid. Two cats rub against her legs and meow.

“Do you have a hundred cats?” I ask

“A hundred? No!” She laughs and I think it is funny how she looks like Darweesh when he was missing so many teeth. “I have nine. Come and meet them.” I go inside with her, and cats jump down from chairs or sit up from the floor. They all look at me, then they turn away. They are not interested.

“I want to see the one with one eye,” I say. She picks up a lazy

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big cat and then sits down and puts it in her lap and scratches behind its ears.

“This is my One-eye. I call her that because she has one eye that is blue and one eye that is yellow.” Come pet her.” I stroke One-eye’s back, and it purrs.

“Do you want to help me feed the cats? Here, break this bread into pieces.” Cat Woman, leans on her stick and rises. I watch her pour milk over the dry bread and left-over porridge. The cats now are interested. Some jump down, some come in, some meow. They are all around her looking up at her and meowing. She says, “OK, OK, here it comes, there’s enough for everyone.” Outside the cottage there are ten small bowls. She spoons the food into them. The meaner cats make angry sounds as they push past the gentler ones to the bowls. Now they are quiet, eating hungrily.

“They are not fasting,” she says, “are you?”

“No,” I say frowning. I remember that it is Ramadan.

“Well, I’m not either,” she laughs, “I’m too old and I suppose you’re too young.

Would you like something to eat?” When Cat Woman asks, I feel hungry. But I remember that I should never eat at someone’s house without asking Mama. I remember that I should not go into the house of someone we do not know. The house is small and clean. Cat Woman is kind and friendly. But I step outside and say, “I need to go home.”

“You are Lateefa’s daughter, no?” She knows my mom!
“Yes,” I say.

Chapter 5 – Tanzania

“Lateefa’s grandmother was my friend. You look like her. I never knew my mother’s grandmother. My own grandmother is very old. Cat Woman must be the oldest person in the world!

“Yes, yes, you look so much like my best friend. Come, see.” She goes inside the house, but I do not follow. Soon she comes out with a beautiful belt in her shaking wrinkled hands.

“We made the same belt, Rahma and I. We learned how to weave this pattern by hand, and we would add shells and beads. We made bracelets and necklaces and belts. No one could make them as pretty as we could.” I touch the coarse palm threads and the smooth shiny shells. “You can have it. It will go around your waist better than mine.” she laughs. I hold the belt with two hands. It is so beautiful, and I am so happy. She ties it around my waist and continues, “Once, in Ramadan we sold some belts and gave the money to the Imam. The masjid used to have iftar for the poor every day. The days were long, and we couldn’t fast, but we had heard the Imam say that if you give someone food to break their fast, you get the same reward.”

The air is cooler now, and I tell her again that I must go home. She gives me a small basket and tells me to follow her. Her eyes crinkle up as she smiles. It is like we are going on an adventure.

“Let me show you something before you go.” The Cat Woman, walks down the path of her garden. There are sweet smelling flowers and vines covering the ground. She turns right and points, her eyes twinkling happily and there in front of us is a very big fig tree.

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“My father planted this tree the first Ramadan I fasted the whole month,” she says. She picks two fat ripe figs and offers me one, and eats the other. The fig is warm and sweet. The tiny seed crunch between my teeth. Cat Woman hits the branches with her stick and others fall. I pick them and put them in the basket.

“Give the figs to your mother. And tell her Ramadan Kareem.” I thank the Cat Woman and skip toward home happily; the leather tassel from the belt hitting against my knees.

I think how things are not always like we first believe. All the children believe that Cat Woman is scary but when I got to know her, I found out she was friendly and kind. They all believe she has a cat with one eye, but I found out that was only the cat’s name.

I can smell the different delicious smells of food cooking for iftar coming from all the homes. I think about Ramadan. Maybe when I get to know Ramadan, I will be surprised. I wonder if I will like it better when I am old enough to fast. I wonder if I will find out it is a happy month. I wonder if I give Darweesh a fig to break his fast on, if I will get reward. I am almost home.

“Aalia! Where’ve you been? Let’s play,” calls Darweesh. He is standing next to my house and carrying my baby brother Muhammad on his back.

I run to him!



CHAPTER 6

MAURITANIA



Chapter 6 – Mauritania

Ramadan, the month of Quran

I'm from Mauritania. My country is in Africa.

My country has elephants and addax.



It has giraffes and jerboas.



Chapter 6 – Mauritania

It has camels and cheetahs.



It has flamingoes and hoopoes



My country is Muslim, and today was the first day of Ramadan. I heard voices at night and I smelled food, so I woke up and found everyone eating *suhoor*.

” I want to fast,” I say. Everyone smiles because they think I can’t finish the whole day. Mother says, “Come and eat *suhoor*, and you can fast until noon.” But I did ten half-days last year and I was only six. I’m older now, and I want to really fast.

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“I want to do the whole day, please let me, Mama.” Ruqia is only three years older than me, but she talks to me like I am a baby.

“When I was your age, I fasted all of Ramadan. It was easy because the days were short and it wasn’t this hot. Now, even mothers and fathers are finding it hard.” I don’t answer because my mouth is full and I want to drink two glasses of water before the *athan* of *fajr*. I think I drink too much, because I feel the water sloshing in my tummy when I pray.

After *fajr*, Mother is tidying up; Grandfather calls me for our daily reading of Quran. Grandfather was not sitting with them at *suhoor*. I know that he gives money for iftar to someone poor everyday of Ramadan.

“Bring the Mushaf, Hadia,” he says. “Yes, Grandfather, right away,” I say politely. I go to Mother and ask her in a low voice, “Why doesn’t Grandfather fast?”

“Grandfather fasted all his life. Now he is old and sick, and he cannot fast.” “But doesn’t he feel sad that he can’t?” Mother smiles but her eyes do not; “Go read Quran with him, he is waiting,” she says.

My Grandfather has white hair; he wears thick glasses and always smells of soap. I sit next to him and place the Quran on the open stand. I have memorized most of the small *surahs* in Juz’ Amma, even some of the long ones. I know all of *surat* Amma perfectly, but I can’t learn al-Bayyinah. I wish al-Bayyinah was not in this, Juz’. My Grandfather opens up the Quran.

Chapter 6 – Mauritania

“Shall I recite Amma?” I ask

“No,” he says looking at me over his glasses, “I want to hear al-Bayyinah.”

Al-Bayyinah is a very difficult *surah*, but I begin to recite it for Grandfather, and of course I get mixed up halfway through. Grandfather asks me,

“Hadia, do you know what Ramadan is about?”

“Yes, Grandfather,” I say, “it is about fasting.” Then I’m sorry I said that because I know he doesn’t fast and I don’t want to hurt his feelings.

“Yes,” he says gently, “but Ramadan is also called the month of Quran and it is also called the month of patience: *sabr*. You need *sabr* to not eat and drink when you are fasting; you need *sabr* to force yourself to do the things that are hard or not fun to do. Do you know how I memorized the Quran when I was a little boy?”

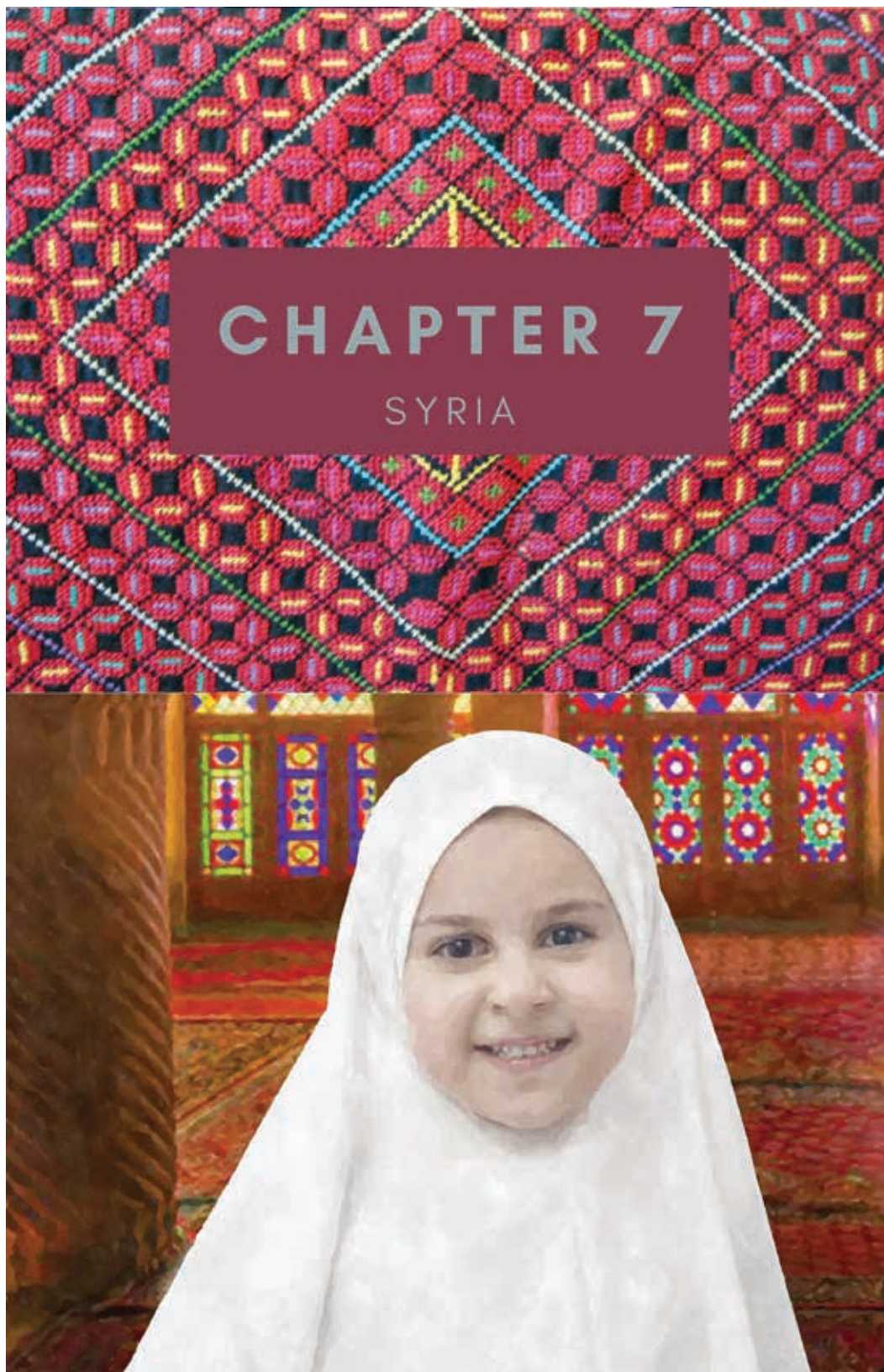
“How Jiddo?” I ask trying to imagine him as a little boy.

“By writing it,” he says. “Every child had something to write on, a piece of wood, a slate, a flat thin stone, and chalk. We wrote and erased and wrote and erased until we learned those ayahs by heart.” I think about what Grandfather said. I know what he is talking about. Father keeps his father’s ‘*lowh*’ in his closet; he showed it to me once. I ask Father if I can borrow it and I tell him why I want it.

I spend most of the day writing al-Bayyinah and erasing it *aya* by *aya*. It is fun. I pretend I am a little girl from long ago. I find fasting is not so hard if you are busy, but I am not so good

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at *sabr*. I take a nap after Asr and then before I know it, it is time for iftar. I am very thirsty and tired, but I help bring out the food. When I hear the adhan, I drink and drink. Everyone is kissing me and congratulating me on my first whole day. Make *dua*', make *dua*', they say. I make *dua*' that I can learn patience. I make *dua*' I can learn the whole Quran like my grandfather. I no longer worry about al-Bayyinah. I think I will learn it very soon.



Chapter 7 – Syria

Half-Hana

It had been a long and very hot day but five and a half-year-old Hana had fasted ‘steps of the minaret.’

She remembers how last year her parents woke her up to peer out the window at the man hitting a drum he clutched under one arm. He was called the *musahhir*, the guy who woke people up an hour before *fajr* so they could eat *suhoor*. He called out ‘Wake up sleeper and say God the Everlasting, is One’ in between raps on his drum: RAP tatap tap tap tap TAP!

This year deep sounds like thunder continue throughout most nights, and *musahharaties*, like other people, dare not go out too late. But Hana woke up to her parents’ call last night, and she ate watermelon and white cheese and she drank a tall glass of water. Then, her father had gone to pray in the mosque, and she had prayed *fajr* with her mom.

Hana fell asleep next to her mom as she read Quran. When she woke up later, the first thing she wanted to do was drink. Mama read some stories to her to help her forget; then Hana helped wash the floors with water. First Hana dusted the furniture while Mama swept the floors, then she watered the plants in the living room. Finally the fun part of pouring water on the tile floor and drying it with a squeegee came! It was like your bare feet were drinking and it made Hana less thirsty.

“Is it *dhuhr* yet?” Hana asks three times in half an hour. By the mid-day prayer she would’ve already completed a half

Chapter 7 – Syria

day's fast!

“No, not yet Hana, but you can break your fast now if you want.” But Hana wanted to fast all the way to the noon prayer, so she went to her room to look out the window. Long ago, Mama used to take her to the park to play. Sometimes, she would let her go play in the garden surrounding their building with the neighbors. Now everything was scary. If Mama saw her sitting next to the window, she would tell her to stay away from the glass. Amme's living-room window broke into pieces last month when there were loud noises. So, Hana takes out the cookie tin full of pictures, pictures of her as a baby, pictures of her in a field filled with blossoming trees, pictures of her wetting her feet in the waves.

“What do you feel like eating, Hana?” asked Mama. Hana was too dizzy by then to think of anything, so she just watched Mama prepare the ‘half-day fasters’ tray.’ The tray was filled with tiny dishes of different foods. There was a dish of stuffed grape leaves, a dish of meat patties, a dish of watermelon and a dish of cherries. To drink, there was water, lemonade with mint, and brown tamarind. Hana waited for the *Mu'ethin* to call the Call to Prayer. Now it was time to eat!

While Hana drank and drank and ate, Mama called Baba and Tete and Amme on the phone,

“Guess who fasted the minaret steps today?” she asked person after person. Mama was proud!

“Why is it called ‘the fast of the minaret steps,’ Mama?” Hana asked. Mama explained that when children begin to fast, they can start out with half a day. To fast a whole day is long just

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like a minaret is tall.

“If you climb up a few steps at a time, you get used to going up all those stairs. If you start out fasting half a day, it makes it easier to fast the whole day later on,” Mama explained.

“Since you are such a big girl now, do you want to try to pray half the *taraweeh* prayer in the mosque?” asked Baba after *iftar* at *maghrib*. Hana was so excited. She ran to her bedroom and took out her blue flowered prayer clothes, they smelled of jasmine perfume.

Now, with her prayer clothes on, Hana stands proudly between Mama and another lady on the second floor of the mosque. From below the wooden patterned railing, she can see the men praying behind the Imam. Above her, fans hum and make her cover billow and sway. The Imam prays aloud, and she recites al-Fatiha with him softly. When she finishes the four *rikas* of Isha, the lady next to her kisses her and gives her a candy. Then Hana prays four more *rikas* with the Imam. Hana does not know the Surahs he reads but she stands still and follows his movements, and she doesn't interrupt her prayer even when she hears the children playing in the corner of the mosque. When she finishes the fourth *rika*, Mama hugs her tight,

“You have finished half the *taraweeh*! Today is a very special day, my Half Hana,” says Mama, her eyes sparkling. “You have made me so happy and proud.” Hana slips off her prayer cover and begins to fold it. She decides that fasting a half day and praying half the *taraweeh* can make one feel completely happy.



Chapter 8 – Malaysia

I am Fatima from Malaysia. My mother and father are doctors. I stay with my grandmother and aunt when my mother and father go to work. My grandmother sews clothes for people and my aunt helps her. All day, I listen to the sewing machine ‘whrrrrrr stop whrrrrrr stop’. I watch Grandmother cut, cut, cut, with her big sharp scissors, the fabric she spreads on the floor. My aunt pins pieces of the cloth together.

Sometimes they let me play with the scraps. The scraps for each dress are placed on top of each other and rolled into a snake shape and fastened with a pin. I like to look at all the different scraps. Some are shiny and slippery, some are sparkly and some are thick and soft. They are so many different colors. My favorite color is blue.

While Grandmother and Auntie sew, they listen to Quran. I know a lot of Quran. When I was three years old, I knew six small *surahs*. Now, I am learning the longer ones. On my fourth birthday, Father said that I must learn what people say when they are sitting in the prayer. Many times, when my father and mother pray at home, I pray with them. I have a small prayer head cover. It is babyish and short, but I still wear it to pray. Sara, my cousin has a big grown up one. It isn’t white- it is yellow with purple flowers; it is so pretty. So, every day when we are not listening to Quran, we go over “*attaheeyatu lilahi wassalawatu.*”

Last year, I wasn’t happy in Ramadan. After *iftar* Mother and Father would go to *taraweeh* and I would stay alone with

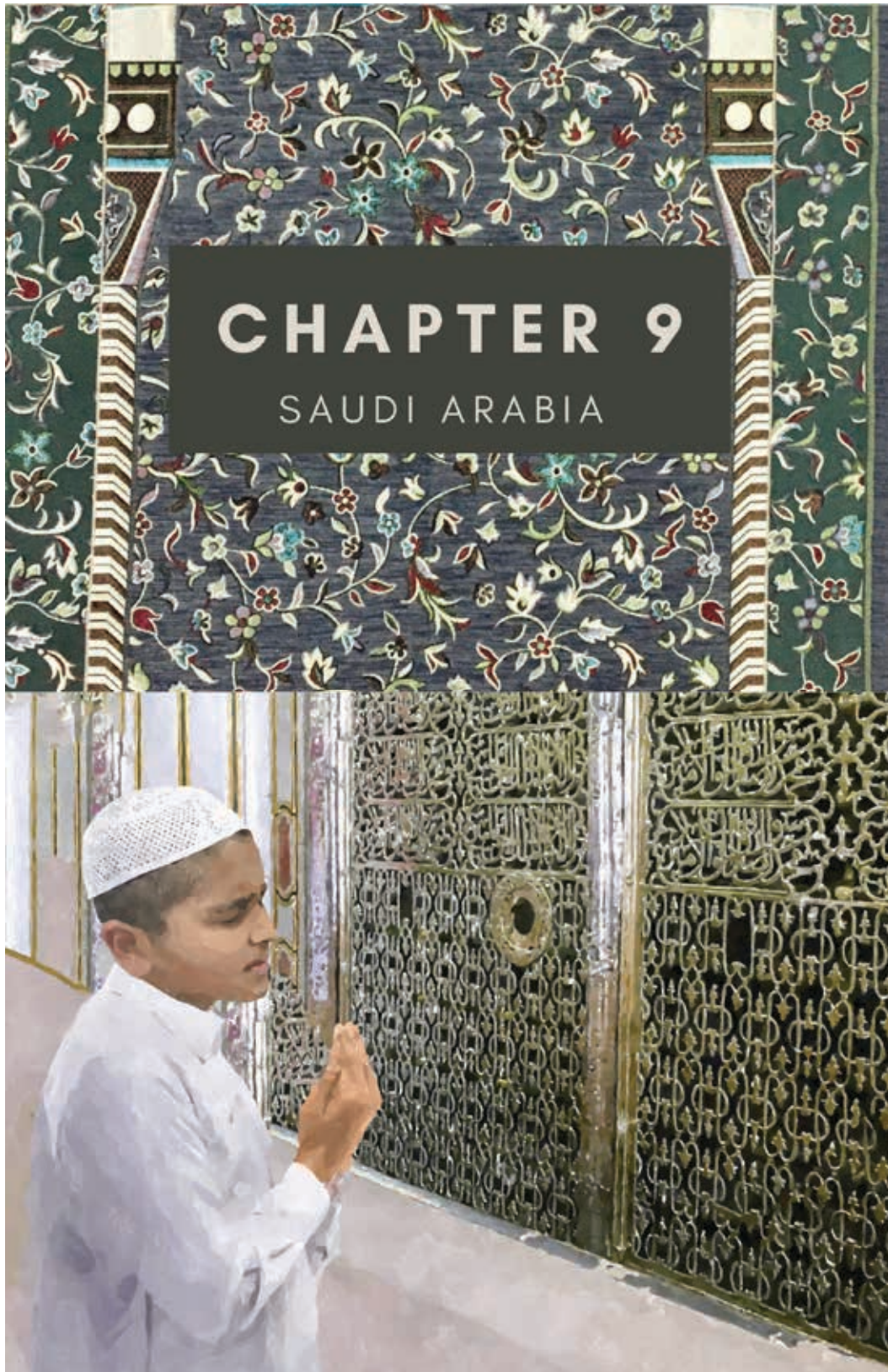
Chapter 8 – Malaysia

Grandmother until it was so VERY late. It was a ‘*sadful*’ Ramadan.

This Ramadan, Father said I can go with mother if I learn the *taheeyatu* and *Allahuma Salli* parts. I am so excited. I asked Sara if she was going, she said, maybe. I want to go to the Masjid and pray with all the women. Every day, I practice and practice, sometimes I think it is more difficult than *surah* al- Bayinah, but I keep trying.

Today is the last day of Sha`ban, and everyone is rushing about. I recite the *taheeyatu* and *salawat Ibraheemieh* in front of the whole family. Mother and Father look so proud. My aunt hugs me and kisses my head. I go to my Grandmother to kiss her hand in thanks. She has taught me so much Quran and she helped me with this too. Now, she has a big smile on her face and her hand is behind her back. She brings out something flat and soft. It is wrapped in tissue paper. I tear it open; it is something blue. I shake it out; it is a prayer cover! The grown-up kind and so beautiful. The fabric is flowered blue on the top and bottom and plain blue in the middle. It has red embroidered flowers and one puffy red flower sewn in the front. I hug it and then hug my grandmother and kiss her hand.

Tonight, I walk to the *masjid* with my mother like a big girl. I am so excited. The *masjid* we go to is only for women. I look at all the women in their white head covers. They are sitting and waiting for the prayer to begin. I stand up for Mother to tie my head cover on, I am like a flying blue bird and the ladies are all clouds. I am so happy. Maybe I am still too young to fast, but this Ramadan I will go with Mother and Auntie to *taraweesh* every night. This is going to be a happy Ramadan!



Chapter 9 – Saudi Arabia

If I were to tell you that I'm from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, you would probably think I lived in a tent in the desert; or perhaps you might think I lived in an apartment building in the desert.

I wish I could blindfold you or pull your hat down to cover your eyes, then I would lead you by the hand to where I live.

“Now, open your eyes,” I would say, and I would look at your surprised face!

See the tree-lined streets? See the trees blooming, bunches and bunches of orange colored flowers? See the fruit market down the road? It's not what you expected, is it?



Ta'if is at the top of a mountain. If you come at night, you will see the road like a glowing golden snake twisting all along the side of the mountain. At the entrance of the city a big sign says, Welcome to the City of Roses, that's because every April Ta'if turns pink! All the farms that grow roses are in bloom. There is a big rose factory that our school takes us

A Ramadan Gift

to visit where they make rose water, rose perfume and many rose creams. They tell us that Ta'if is called the rose capital of the world.



But maybe you would be more interested in riding a camel. I would show you how to lean back when the camel leans forward and you would laugh with excitement when you see how high up you are once it stands. But I'll bet you'd be more interested in the monkeys. We have more baboons than camels and they are quite tame. They come to the side of the road and people feed them. They have a leader who has a lot of gray hair around his face. He frowns and watches us from a distance. We have two very big amusement parks and if you don't want to ride a car up the mountain, you can go by cable car.

I fasted six whole days so far this Ramadan. It is cool in Ta'if and that makes it easier for me to fast, but soon we will be going to Mecca. My father will drive, and my grandmother and aunts will come with us. Two other vans will have my cousins and uncles and their wives. First, we head to Medina. It is a long drive and because we are fasting, and it is July and hot, we travel at night after *taraweeh*.

Chapter 9 – Saudi Arabia

This way we can stop for ice cream (for us) and tea and coffee for the big people on the way.

Finally, just in time, we get to Medina. I love staying in Medina. Our hotel is two streets away from the mosque. We quickly leave our bags in our hotel rooms and rush down for *suhoor*. I am hoping I can fast the rest of Ramadan!

My mom worries about everything. When she isn't worried that the baboons might bite me and give me rabies, she is worried I will catch some kind of flu from the camels. Right now, it's cavities she's worried about. So, we all have to go upstairs and brush our teeth and then rush, rush, rush to the elevators, down the street among the crowds (now she's worried I'll get lost) and into the masjid.

There is no time to walk the long distance to the entrance of the *masjid* so we line up with the many crowds in the courtyard. My mom has brought a prayer rug with her, but I don't mind doing *sujood* on the warm sparkling marble especially since it is a short prayer.

After *fajr* is women's visitation time. My mom will go with my uncle's wives and my cousins Haya and Jana to visit Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ grave. My father takes my baby sister in his arms and I follow him to the hotel. As the sun begins to rise, we draw the blackout curtains, and turn up the AC. This is how we start our upside-down day. Now, it is time to sleep.

We wake up for the prayers and go back to sleep until just before maghrib. Now it is time to go to the masjid. The sky is turning shades of lilac and pink, 'Taif colors', I think. I remember the list of food and drinks I've been thinking about

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all day and it doesn't matter anymore. Long thin plastic table cloths are spread on the marble flooring outside. Bread, dates, yogurt, water, and spices are set for each person. I quickly find a place for my father and uncles. There is an old Turkish man sitting to my left, he smiles and offers me an apple. I thank him and he pats my back. He seems happy and proud that I am fasting.

Finally, the *adhan* is called! We make *dua* and drink and drink. The dates taste so sweet, the yogurt with Medina spices is yummy and the bread is fresh. Soon the plastic is being rolled away. Men riding huge vacuum cleaners sweep, spray soapy water and the floors are made sparkling clean. Now we are lining up for prayer. After Maghrib, we weave our way past people praying, people reading Quran, people resting. We are going to visit.

At the courtyard, I meet my cousins, Ahmad, Jawad, and Sakher. We race around the open space while our fathers chat. We can see the green dome from where we stand. Under it is the Prophet's grave. Between the minbar and the grave, the carpets are green to show us where the Rowda is. The Rowda is like a garden in Paradise, Janna. People take turns praying and watching out for those praying to make sure no one accidentally bumps into someone in *sujood*. My mother always makes my father promise he will stand next to me while I pray. He tries to explain to her that it is not as crowded as the women's area – but she worries.

Now we are facing the gate behind which is the grave. My father gives the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ his *Salams*. Soon it will be *taraweeh* and then we will head back to the hotel to eat.

Chapter 9 – Saudi Arabia

I watch my father with his head bowed and his hands outstretched. I think about the Prophet ﷺ. I think about the story of his sad visit to Ta'if and how badly they treated him. I give him peace and blessings upon him, my *salam*s. My teacher says he answers us back. So, I tell him if he were to visit Taif now, how we would all celebrate. I tell him they built a masjid where, during his life, he rested and had some grapes. I tell him I am trying to fast more days than last year. I tell him I am proud to be named after him, Ahmad. I see Sakher by the door motioning to me. I run to him.