

By Night in Saudi

written by

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1. THE ILLNESS

EXT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL - DAY

MALIKA runs up the concrete steps at the front of a giant, modern glass building. She is wearing a black abaya and a bag with a political science degree pin.

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL FRONT DESK - CONTINUOUS

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL WHITE CORRIDORS - CONTINUOUS

Malika rushes down the halls and passes 2 NURSES pushing stretchers, and finds the room she's looking for.

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She sees her FATHER bedridden with a ventilator. Her MOTHER, also wearing an abaya, is holding his hand. All proceeding dialogue in Arabic unless in English (indicated with *Italics*)

MALIKA
How is he doing?

Malika's mother's expression says it all. They sit in silence by her father's bed and Malika reaches for his hand.

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL DINING HALL - LATER

Malika and her mother sit in front of each other at a plain white table, holding mass-produced generic white coffee mugs in their hands. Neither of them drink from the cups.

MOTHER
He isn't going to make it.

Silence.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
I know we talked about this last time but please reconsider Ahmed's offer. We don't know when we'll come across that kind of generosity again. It would mean the world to your father.

MALIKA
I just have a year left - I'm on track to graduate with honors...
(MORE)

MALIKA (CONT'D)

Can I postpone it? I'm not
ungrateful for his favor, I am just
so close -

MOTHER

Do you know what it would do to
your father to die without seeing
you married and your future
secured?

MALIKA

Mother, I -

MOTHER

If you don't marry Ahmed within the
next two days, your father will die
unhappy and you will have been the
cause. There is nothing else to
say.

MALIKA

I understand.

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Malika and her mother sit by her father in silence. Her
father shuffles his hand over to rest it on Malika's.

2. THE WEDDING

INT. AL-RAJHI MOSQUE ATRIUM - MORNING

A large, extravagant white mosque with gold trimmings that
could fit at least 2000 people kneeling within its dome. It
looks empty, but then all the way at the front we see a group
of five people around a desk. An IMAM (late 60s) stands
behind it. Malika stands beside AHMED (mid 40s) on the other
side of the desk. HALIMAH (early 30s) stands off to the side
with Malika's Mother. The Nikah ceremony is very brief.

IMAM

O mankind, fear your Lord, who
created you from one soul and
created from it its mate and
dispersed from both of them many
men and women. And fear Allah,
through whom you ask one another,
and the wombs. Indeed Allah is
ever, over you, an Observer.

Everyone else's heads are bowed in prayer, but Malika's eyes, visible through her niqab, are looking out to the glass windows of the dome.

IMAM (CONT'D)

O you who have believed, fear Allah
and speak words of appropriate
justice.
He will [then] amend for you your
deeds and forgive you your sins.
And whoever obeys Allah and His
Messenger has certainly attained a
great attainment.

Malika presents Ahmed with a modest Dowry package, hastily assembled and wrapped. The ceremony concludes with the signing of a document. Halimah and the Mother, as the two sane witnesses, also sign the document. The Imam leaves the mosque. The mother holds Ahmed's and Malika's heads against her shoulders and whispers a prayer that we do not hear.

INT. KING FAISAL HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Ahmed and Malika stand by the bedside of the father. The father painstakingly shuffles his hand over to rest it on top of Ahmed's and struggles to say the Arabic words to give thanks.

AHMED

For the longest time you have been
my dearest friend, and now I can
call you my father as well.

Ahmed prays at the father's deathbed.

AHMED (CONT'D)

O God. You are my protector in this
world and in the Hereafter. Let me
die as one who has surrendered to
You and join me with the righteous.

Malika's Father closes his eyes.

3. THE NEW HOME

EXT. AHMED'S HOME - EVENING

Ahmed and Malika's car approaches two large white gates separating the road from Ahmed's home.

Halimah and a YOUNG BOY (8-10) open the gates, and the car drives up to a modest brick home.

EXT. AHMED'S ENGRAVED DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Malika follows Ahmed over the threshold of her new home. He does not hold the door for her.

INT. AHMED'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

To the right is the entry to the small kitchen, to the left a way into the living room. Directly in front, another engraved wooden door.

Ahmed nods to Malika and hands over her suitcase to Halimah who is coming out of the kitchen. He opens the engraved door, disappears inside his study, and locks it behind him. Halimah motions for her to follow her through the kitchen to the living quarters and disappears.

Malika stands alone under the dome of the foyer for a second.

INT. MALIKA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We hear very few coherent words as Halimah chatters excitedly about the home and Malika's room. Malika takes in her surroundings with an ambiguous expression. The bedroom is simple: a queen bed with simple white bedding and two pillows, a dark wooden desk, chair, vanity, and mirror.

HALIMAH

- and I've tried to tell him the wallpaper isn't very welcoming to guests, it's rather cold I think - I know it's just white but something about the pattern is too sharp - but its okay because who knew the next guest we would have in this room would be here to stay?! Also the bathrooms are on the...-

Halimah's chattering continues as she leaves Malika's room. Malika does not follow her. She waits a little bit until she knows Halimah is not coming back into her room.

Malika reaches for the suitcase Halimah left in the middle of the room. She rummages around and finally pulls out an edition of "War and Change in World Politics" and a pen.

She sits on the bed on top of the sheets and begins to peruse her book, full of small markings and notes in the margins.

She flips to the chapter "Hegemonic War and International Change" and begins to write in the margins in extremely small handwriting. The evening turns to night as the sun sets outside her window. She continues writing.

4. THE MALL.

EXT. MALL - DAY

A group of 4 women in abayas walk in a cluster towards the entrance to a large mall. Three children flutter around them and are chased by two NANNIES (late 30s) in light pink tops and bottoms, almost like scrubs.

INT. MALL COFFEE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

The women sit together chattering in Arabic. Malika is silent and looking off into the distance at the mall directory.

MALIKA

Excuse me a minute, I'm just
looking for the restroom...

One of the nanny's points her in the right direction.

The other women in abayas pay no attention and continue chatting away.

INT. MALL SHOPS - CONTINUOUS

Malika walks in the direction of the restrooms then turns right at two hall intersections to circle back around. She walks past several extravagant stores and coffee shops and finally comes across a small, contemporary Internet cafe.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Malika pays for 25 minutes on one of the two open computer terminals.

The men in kandouras surrounding her give her a funny look as she sits down but turn back to their own terminals immediately.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

Malika logs onto her email account at the UAEU and finds 3 unopened messages from her PUBLISHER.

She opens the first one.

PUBLISHER

"Congratulations Mr. Shams! You have been published in the American Journal of Political Science. You have been awarded a grant to pursue your research in the Territorial State system and in Hegemonic War. The funds will be transferred to your account within the following week. Please confirm that the information below is still correct."

Malika doesn't scroll down or respond but moves on to the next email.

PUBLISHER (CONT'D)

"Greetings, Mr. Shams. I'm just reaching out as some time has passed and I haven't heard or received anything from you. I need your confirmation for the account information in order to receive your grant. Moreover, the American Journal of Political Science and the Political Science Quarterly have been asking to get in contact with you, Mr. Malik Shams, at your earliest convenience. They have questions about what you are working on. Looking forward to hearing from you."

Malika flips to the last email.

PUBLISHER (CONT'D)

"Mr. Shams, I'm reaching out to ask you to contact me at your earliest convenience. Your grant is at risk if you do not. Thank you."

BACK TO SCENE

Malika begins typing up a draft of her new paper in a new email. The men around her are all playing different action video games like Call of Duty. Dark screens with white Kandouras contrasted with Malika's white document screen and black abaya.

After some time, she looks outside for a second to rest her eyes.

INT. MALL CORRIDOR SHOPS - CONTINUOUS

Malika sees one of the nanny's outside the Internet cafe chasing Halimah's young boy.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Malika's eyes widen as she realizes the time. She looks at the timer in the upright corner of the monitor screen.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

It has been 12 minutes, and Malika has typed up 18 pages of her thoughts entirely from memory without her textbook anywhere nearby. She saves the draft, logs out.

BACK TO SCENE

Malika grabs her bag hastily and rushes out the tinted glass doors of the shop.

INT. MALL CORRIDOR SHOPS - MOMENTS LATER

Malika spots the nannies and identifies the group of women in the abayas as Halimah and co. Malika rushes to join them - she'd been there the whole time! The women are busy chattering to one another and pay no mind.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN TABLE - EVENING

Malika and Ahmed sit in silence and eat their food. Halimah is chattering away, fade in.

HALIMAH

- and can you believe she would say such a thing? In front of her employer! I know Khalifa was being unruly but he's just a little boy! Anyway Huda laughed it off but I could tell she was shocked at Maria's insolence. But what could she say to her in front of all of us! I'm sure Khaled put her in her place once they were home -

Malika continues staring blankly at her plate of food.

INT. MALL CORRIDOR SHOPS - DAY

The 4 women in abayas walk down the long halls of the mall. One trails slightly behind the others, and branches off to turn left into another corridor as the other three keep laughing and chatting amongst themselves.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - MOMENTS LATER

Malika sets a few coins down at the counter and sits at an open terminal. A few men look up at her.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

She logs onto her email and continues her draft. 10 minutes pass. She finishes the paper - it is 34 pages long. She sends it as an email attachment to her publisher.

MALIKA (EMAIL)

Sorry for the delayed response. I had taken a short hiatus due to family priorities. I'm confirming the account details for the grant. Here is my new paper on Hegemonic war. Looking forward to hearing your thoughts.

She hits send, logs off.

BACK TO SCENE

Malika grabs her purse and rushes out of the cafe.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN TABLE - EVENING

Malika and Ahmed sit in silence and eat their food. Halimah is chattering away, fade in.

HALIMAH

- absolutely hysterical! You should have seen her face! Malika was there, do you remember Malika?? Yousef is such a troublemaker but the shopkeeper was livid! Yousef is just a boy, I was saying, boys will be boys! But the shopkeeper -

Malika continues staring blankly at her plate of food.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - DAY

Malika slides into the chair at a computer terminal. None of the men look up this time.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

Malika opens a new email from her publisher. It was sent to her the previous evening, just after she had left the mall.

PUBLISHER

Mr. Shams, brilliant as ever! I should have known not to worry! I edited a few technical details and sent it out - the International Political Science Review accepted it immediately, and I expect many other journals will be in contact later today. I've already had several dignitaries contact me to have a discussion with you, but I have been fielding them on your behalf for now. Congratulations, Mr. Shams! What should I expect from you next?

While she is reading this, she is notified that she has received another email in her inbox. She opens it, its from her publisher.

PUBLISHER (CONT'D)

Mr. Shams, you know I would not allow any solicitors your information but I have to ask you make an exception for Imam Zayed Al-Shamsi, whom you may already know as an extremely brilliant and pious figure. He has asked me to set up an interview with you at his Riyadh estate. I am inclined to do so, as this is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I highly recommend you take advantage of. It could take your readership far out of the political science sphere and into a much more far-reaching domain if Imam Zayed endorses it. Please respond at your earliest convenience.

BACK TO SCENE

Malika's eyes widen in excitement for a second, but then she regains her composure and stares blankly at the screen for a few seconds.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

Malika begins typing a draft of an email.

MALIKA

Please pass along my sincere thanks to Imam Zayed for his interest in my work. Unfortunately, I am not able to meet -

BACK TO SCENE

Two MEN in kandouras snicker as they pass Malika to sit at another terminal. The first man brushes his hand along the back of her chair and shoulders as they pause by her.

FIRST MAN

Hey sweetheart, shouldn't you be across the aisle looking at Louboutins?

SECOND MAN

Or down the hall buying oud?

The first man winks at her.

FIRST MAN

If you were my wife I'd never let you strain your pretty eyes on that computer screen.

The men laugh to themselves as they keep walking.

Malika stares after them for a second.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

Malika deletes her first email draft and begins to type a new one:

MALIKA

Please thank Imam Zayed sincerely for his interest. I am available to meet tomorrow evening, after Isha. I look forward to his response.

She sends the email.

INT. MALL CORRIDOR SHOPS - CONTINUOUS

Malika rests her eyes outside and sees women in abayas in every shop across the aisle.

INT. INTERNET CAFE - CONTINUOUS

She looks around inside. All men in kandouras around her. A few of their employees also enjoying some time off, also men.

She looks at the bookshelves - all men authors.

INTERNET CAFE MONITOR SCREEN

Malika receives a notification that she has a new email. It's the publisher again. She opens it.

PUBLISHER

Excellent, Mr. Shams! I have arranged for you to meet at his estate at 10 pm. Please let me know how the meeting goes, I would love to hear all about him.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN TABLE - EVENING

Malika and Ahmed sit in silence and eat their food. Halimah is chattering away, fade in.

HALIMAH

- and I was totally taken aback! Faris has always been a bit of a rogue but he's just a little boy! Hannah's response was so unacceptable, she's employed for a reason!

Ahmed grunts in response.

HALIMAH (CONT'D)

- She apologized but still, that she said that in the first place -

Malika continues staring blankly at her plate of food.

INT. MALIKA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Malika sits on her bed holding the textbook but is not looking at it. She stares blankly out the window.

After some time, she realizes she isn't focusing, and turns out the bedroom light. Blackout.

5. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

INT. MALL COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The women in abayas sit around a coffee table and chatter animatedly, overlapping, and inaudible.

Malika sits with them, but is staring out the window, watching the shadows of palm trees elongate slowly.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN TABLE - EVENING

Malika and Ahmed sit in silence and eat their food. Halimah is chattering away, fade in.

HALIMAH

- she tells the silliest tales! If I wasn't her closest friend I would never have believed that Yousef could do such a thing! But he is a boy, he needs some time to grow, he needs space to explore and make mischief once in a while -

Malika continues staring blankly at her plate of food.

INT. MALIKA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Malika sits on her bed and stares at the small clock on her vanity. It shows it is 8:55.

She picks up her textbook and looks at her notes in the margins. She's not focusing. She looks back at the clock. 8:57.

She lies down, tries to close her eyes. Her eyes flutter restlessly. She opens her eyes to look at the clock again. 9:02.

Impatiently, she turns over to face away from the vanity clock.

The clock shows 9:50 when Malika's hand reaches to cautiously open her bedroom door.

INT. AHMED'S FOYER - LATER

Malika undoes the bolts on the engraved front door cautiously. She opens the door without a sound and creeps out.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Halimah stands at the kitchen sink rinsing a baby bottle. A movement outside the window catches her eye, and she looks up.

EXT. AHMED'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Malika moves swiftly across the front yard to the gates. The movement that catches Halimah's eye is the white gate catching the light of a street lamp as malika opens and closes it behind her.

INT. AHMED'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Halimah looks out after Malika for a second.

She turns around and opens her mouth to say something to Ahmed.

Ahmed looks up from his newspaper at Halimah quizzically.

Halimah shuts her mouth and turns back around to finish washing the bottle. Ahmed looks back down at his newspaper.

EXT. STREETS OF RIYADH - NIGHT

Malika walks down the street with a quickened pace, partly of fear, and partly in order to be on time. She passes 3 MEN smoking against the outside gates of a house. They rise and follow a few paces behind as she crosses them.

FIRST MAN

Hey lady, where are you going so late?

SECOND MAN

A lady shouldn't be walking alone so late, let us walk with you.

THIRD MAN

You wouldn't want someone to...
take advantage of you, would you?

SECOND MAN

Or turn you in.. there's a law
against running from your husband
you know...

FIRST MAN

Aw we don't want to turn you in
darling, we just want to see you
make it where you want to go..

SECOND MAN

Let's walk with her. Make sure she
doesn't spend the whole night
alone...

Malika speeds up. She looks down the street and sees the
estate she's looking for.

She breaks into a run but her abaya is restricting.

FIRST MAN

Aw don't run my love, we just want
to care for you!

THIRD MAN

You can't run too far with that
abaya on - do us all a favor and
take it off!!

The men stop pursuing her after a few moments and go back to
smoking against the wall. Malika doesn't stop running until
she reaches the colossal, ornate gates of Zayed's estate. She
stops, flabbergasted.

EXT. ZAYED'S ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

A DOORMAN opens the huge gates when he realizes someone is
outside.

DOORMAN

My love, are you lost? I'm afraid
my master will not be able to offer
much help to you. I can try to help
you find your way.

MALIKA

Actually I'm here to meet with Imam
Zayed.

DOORMAN

Oh! Yes, he said he was expecting a visitor. Pardon me, I didn't realize you would be -

Malika stares. He backtracks.

DOORMAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, my deepest apologies.
Please, follow me!

He walks Malika to the front door of a huge white concrete palace. At the entrance stands IMAM ZAYED in a white kandoura. Tall, perfectly groomed, commanding attention and looking like a king at the top of the front steps to his palace.

Zayed looks at Malika in her abaya shrewdly for a second. His face grows dark as he looks at his doorman, demanding an explanation. Malika is terrified that she will not be welcomed.

Suddenly, it dawns on Zayed and his face breaks into a huge grin.

He reaches to hold her hand in both of his to show his respect.

ZAYED

"...and women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner..." (2:228)

Zayed holds the door open for Malika and waits for her to cross before he follows her over the threshold. He nods to his doorman who leaves silently. Jokingly,

ZAYED (CONT'D)

You don't know how happy I am to meet you, Mr. Malik Shams.

INT. ZAYED'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Malika is stunned into silence by the extravagance of the foyer. Elaborate white concrete dome with gold trimmings and islamic art around the periphery portray stories depicted in the Quran. Pure gold calligraphy on the walls. Islamic arches and pillars hold up the domed ceiling.

ZAYED

My dear, I have to say I respect your work even more now that I know your real identity, and the pains you must have gone through to get where you are. Please, tell me your true name, consider me a friend as I am thrilled to meet someone like you.

Malika can not respond. She is still soaking in her surroundings. She tries to identify the artwork on the walls and wonders if they are authentic 16th century Persian miniature paintings.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

Your silence is a gracious and respectful response but you do not have to hold your tongue in front of me. I'm here to learn from you.

Malika raises an eyebrow that Zayed does not see as she turns away to look more closely at the calligraphy.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

Are you worried about your husband? I assume that's why you write under an alias? I assure you I can hold my peace about such domestic affairs.

Malika looks at him but doesn't respond. He backtracks a little, but when he talks he is confident and charming as ever.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

Alright I suppose I'll start. Would you like some Qahwa? I have.. friends - in Yemen, who pick the most incredible arabica beans of the most rich flavor you will ever taste. The coffee tradition began in Yemen, did you know that?

Zayed trails off as he crosses through two pillars down a long, equally ornately-decorated corridor.

INT. ZAYED'S ESTATE, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Malika follows him. Zayed stands at the end of the hall at a solid gold door, unlocking it with a skeleton key.

As Zayed opens the gate for her, Malika's jaw drops.

INT. ZAYED'S ESTATE, LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

She crosses through the gold gate into an astounding library. The ceiling is painted to imitate the Sistine Chapel, with incredibly famous works reinterpreted onto the domed ceiling. The floor-to-ceiling filled bookshelves are dark mahogany wood and trimmed with gold as they near the dome. Ancient manuscripts towards the top, contemporary non-fiction on topics ranging from gardening to military strategy. A large mahogany desk in the far corner is set with an antique gold Dallah and two ceramic, gold-trimmed qahwa cups on a gold-engraved tray.

Zayed watches her for a second and smiles. He then crosses to the desk and gestures casually to the two large wooden arm chairs set at the desk. Malika, magnetized, follows him and seats herself on one of the chairs. Zayed slides a leather bound, gold-engraved notebook from the top of the desk into one of the drawers. As he locks the drawer:

ZAYED

You seem to like it, I'm quite flattered.

All Malika can muster is a nod.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I didn't always have this. My family was wealthy but very stingy, so I never knew my father had money until he passed away. In my youth, they were very conservative in every way, and I ended up becoming an imam under their.. guidance - at 14.

Malika's eyebrows raise in surprise. It's an extremely arduous process to become an imam in Saudi Arabia, and that Zayed underwent it at such a young age..

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I was in the middle of my education, and I didn't want to stop, but my parents were fairly.. adamant that religion came first.

Zayed pours the coffee. He adds sugar to Malika's and offers it to her.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

After I had started practicing, I think I was around 16, when a man took interest in me. His name was Hafiz.

MALIKA

The poet Hafiz?

ZAYED

He, indeed. He wasn't always a poet. He was a literary critic first. He approached me one day after I had led the Fajr Namaaz, and when he found out my education had been interrupted by my duty, he invited me to his home to talk about literature, and to continue learning. When I saw his library, I fell in love, felt something I recognize in the way you're feeling now.

Malika is unsure of how to respond to this so she says nothing. She is still slightly dazed by his presence. He continues speaking as he paces around his books.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I knew my duty would primarily be to my community and my religion, but there was no harm in pursuing my passion on the side! I would lead the Isha prayers at sundown and would spend every night studying in that library before leading the Fajr prayers at dawn. I did this continuously for 3 years, until I felt comfortable holding an intelligent conversation about every classic author and their prominent works, every literary era, every style of writing.. And then I began to seek out conversations with people who had the most well-respected opinions on each of the topics I had learned about.

Malika is in awe of Zayed's dedication. He can tell he's impressing her. He sits down across from her

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I get the feeling some parts of this story resonate with you. You don't have to tell me your whole story now, because I know you will when you're ready, and I know this won't be the last time I'll be seeing you.

Malika manages to pull herself together enough to respond.

MALIKA

Deepest apologies if I've been rude, sir, I have just been taken aback - I have never seen anything like your home.

Zayed chuckles, charmed.

ZAYED

Don't worry, all in good time. However, I've invited you here to discuss your recent paper.

Zayed reaches into another drawer of the desk and pulls out a manila folder. He opens it to remove a printed document, and flips to a portion of it he has highlighted.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

"The first is that a hegemonic war is distinct from other categories of war; it is caused by broad changes in political, strategic, and economic affairs. The second is that the relationship among individual states can be conceived as a system; the behavior of states is determined in large part by their strategic interaction. The third is that a hegemonic war threatens and transforms the structure of the international system; whether or not the participants in the conflict are initially aware of it, at stake is the hierarchy of power and relations among states in the system" - would you care to explain your theories on Hegemonic War to me?

MALIKA

Yes, of course. I was inspired by recent events all over the Arab world to examine how we classify war and its causes, and who we blame. In my latest paper, I wanted to prove that the way we classify wars leads to the international responses they garner, and the lack of aid to victims is due to the set-up of the international system and their strategic interaction.

Zayed raises an eyebrow.

ZAYED

If you can prove the international structure guilty as you have set out to do, you would be vindicating several superpowers for the plight of refugees.

MALIKA

Yes, and the plights of other sufferers of major wars in our proximity.

Malika hesitates to reveal directly that she is talking about Yemen. Zayed is intrigued.

ZAYED

What are you hoping to achieve by shifting the blame onto other states?

MALIKA

At the very least, I aim to explain why they should be held accountable. At the most, I hope it should garner attention and be the beginning of change and peace, and a new international structure wherein these superpowers act out of interest for the global order rather than their individual, pettily-divided states.

Zayed is charmed by her innocent hope.

ZAYED

I should only hope you will achieve what you set out to do. This world could use a new international structure if it means those who suffer will be relieved.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

"And We indeed tested those who were before them" 29:2

ZAYED (CONT'D)

My dear, I'm so happy I have met you. I'd like to discuss this further. I know you are hesitant to reveal your whole self to me as we have just met, but all in good time. For now -

Zayed pauses as he reaches in another drawer of the desk. He extracts another skeleton key, this one with a ruby encrusted bow.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I'll give you this. You are welcome here any time my dear. What's mine is only mine to share with you - do not hesitate

Malika takes the key, surprised at its weight.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

Excellent. We are friends. And as a friend, I must invite you to the small get-together I will be hosting next Jumah (Friday). I would be honored if you would join us, and I think you would enjoy it. Just a few friends meeting to talk about literature, politics, and states of affairs over some good food and drink.

MALIKA

I'm honored, thank you for the invitation, but I -

ZAYED

I assume you're worried about your husband?

MALIKA

I -

ZAYED

He needn't find out. And if he does I'll take care of it, you have nothing to worry about. I'll see you next Friday.

Malika opens her mouth to protest but the intrigue gets the better of her. She hesitates just long enough to spur a knowing smile from Zayed. He repeats, in his self-assured manner.

ZAYED (CONT'D)

I'll see you next Friday.

END OF ACT I