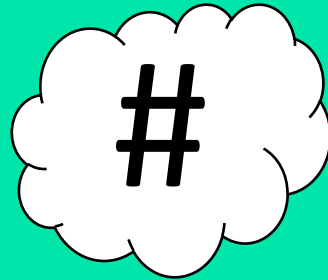
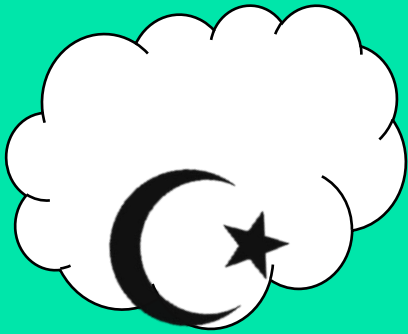




The Messengers

Book 9

CONCEPT CONUNDRUM



Dua Imam e Zamana

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ
اللَّهُمَّ كُنْ لَوْلِيِّكَ الْحُجَّةِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ
صَلَوَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آبَائِهِ
فِي هَذِهِ السَّاعَةِ وَفِي كُلِّ سَاعَةٍ
وَلِيًّا وَحَافِظًا وَقَائِدًا وَنَاصِرًا وَدَلِيلًا وَعَيْنًا
حَتَّى تُسْكِنَهُ أَرْضَكَ طَوْعًا وَتُمَتِّعَهُ فِيهَا طَوِيلًا.

In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful
O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of
Muhammad
O Allah, be, for Your representative, the Hujjat
(proof), son of AlHasan,
Your blessings be on him and his forefathers,
in this hour and in every hour,
a guardian, a protector, a leader, a helper, a proof,
and an eye,
until You make him live on the earth, in obedience (to
You), and cause him to live in it for a long time.



‘Prepared by Asr’

Please recite Surah-e-Fatiha for Syed Nadeem-ul-Hasan and Mr. & Mrs. Syed Naseem-ul-Hasan. You lovely people, we miss you!!!

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Chapter 1 - Restaurant Revolt

Summer edged its way, gently enveloping Peaceville. Warmth was seeping through the gusty winds that had been wailing around the town for the past few months. The sparkling rays of the sun shone brightly in the azure sky. Sweet laughter of children danced in the air as they skipped on their way to school. The slightly older kids were chatting away non-stop as exams were approaching. Showing their vast array of colours, were the beautiful trees; standing tall with the strength that their Lord provided them with; shading all those beneath.

Samir sat on the wooden bench at the edge of the central park. He grinned as he watched his little girl. Sonu frolicked through the tall blades of grass, humming a little tune to herself. They had come to drop Zain off. She, on the other hand, was on a week's break. Her school was to begin on Monday. Sonu was looking forward to it. She liked school. They did all kinds of activities like painting, colouring and even on special occasions; cooking. She smiled as she spotted a butterfly.

“Sonu!” called out Samir. “It’s time to go.”



Nodding in acknowledgement, she skipped through the grass right into her father's arms. Holding her hand tightly, he walked down the concrete path to where the chauffeur was waiting with the car.

Sonu writhed uncomfortably in her seat as Samir fastened her belt. Her squat legs banged on the back of the vacant seat in front her.

"My seat is squeezing me!" she complained. Samir stopped and felt the edges of the child seat.

"My, my, you are right! Well, it seems that my little girl is growing up! She is too big to fit in her child seat."

Sonu gave him a toothy smile,

"Will I have to sit without a seat?" she asked innocently. Samir smiled and ruffled her hair.

"We'll see." He buckled the child strap and sat down on the front seat. Though their house wasn't very far away, it took quite a while to drive down the straight road. As it was the end of the school year, the sidewalks were flooded with children of all ages and sizes. Little toddlers rushed about the streets, followed by exasperated parents. Preteens were busy putting on stunts and shows to impress their peers and others. The older teenagers were leisurely strolling through the chaotic midst, taking their time; knowing they will reach school on time.

The car rumbled down the concrete road, set between the rolling blankets of green grass bordering it. The branches were budding leaves and a few had their boughs bent with acorns; not ripe yet. Sonu was singing one of her illegible songs as she playfully waved the plastic doll in her hand.

Once they arrived, Samir unbuckled Sonu from her seat. She ran up to the large front door. With as much energy as her tiny legs could muster, she jumped and hit the doorbell.

Inside, the house was filled with incessant ringing. Hannah, the house keeper, rushed to open the door. Sonu bounded up to her and gave her a big hug. Hannah smiled and sent her up to her room to wash up and get

ready for breakfast. She welcomed Samir and then closed the door, shutting out the cold spring gale.

“Welcome Samir Baba, how was Zain? I know he was a little nervous. He has a big soccer match today.” she asked, taking his coat.

“Indeed! He was a little nervous in the beginning, but felt better after he saw Ali.”

“Ali?”

“Oh, Ali is Shajeeh’s son. He’s gotten quite tall now.”

Hannah smiled, “Time flies by...”

Samir shook his head in agreement and took a seat on the couch. He was very hungry. Sonu was feeling no different. She came running down the stairs as fast as she could on her chubby little legs.

Soon Hannah gave the awaited call, “Come on everyone. Food is served!”

Samir and Sonu arrived promptly in the larger dining room. Samir sat at the head of the table.

It was a simple yet sumptuous meal. Hannah laid down a steaming plate of scrambled eggs, accompanied by warm crunchy toast. There was fruit salad made of fresh fruits. They all enjoyed the meal and washed it down with an ice-cold glass of orange juice.

After helping Hannah with the dishes, Samir went up to his room. He had to do some office work. He stretched out his legs and flexed his fingers over the computer. He had a lot of work to do and he wanted to get it done as soon as possible. It took a couple of hours. About an hour before Zuhr prayers, Samir was done. Gently, he placed the computer on his side table and stretched his arms.

“Hannah!” He called out. Hannah looked up and came to Samir’s room.

“Yes?” She responded.

He smiled. “Hannah, I am going out for a while. I might have lunch there, so don’t wait for me if I get late.”

Hannah nodded. “Don’t forget to wear a thick coat, Samir Baba. It’s quite chilly today.”



Samir shook his head in disbelief. “Hannah, will I ever be old enough that you do not feel the need to remind me?” He smiled at the old woman. “I have kids of my own now, but you still think I’m a kid! Isn’t it?”

Hannah’s face wore a determined look. “Whether you’re thirteen or thirty; it doesn’t make a difference to me. You will always be the same little three-year-old, who troubled me many times by not wearing his coat and falling sick. Oh! Don’t forget about Zain’s match this afternoon.”

Samir smiled. After a few minutes, he left. He drove into town, and then decided to stop at the community centre to see what was happening today.

The community centre was situated about a minute walk from the mosque. It consisted of various halls and centres to suit the need of the community. There were facilities for various common sports like, tennis, football, soccer, badminton, sprinting; as well as the separated facilities for the activities like swimming, gymnastics and aerobics, etc. It also had an array of halls to cater for various occasions like auditoriums for theatrical plays and a fine dine-in restaurant which also provided catering services at decent prices.

He strolled through the smooth cemented walkways, deep in thought; doing his daily accountability for that day. His concentration was disturbed by the loud adhaan from the mosque.

Without a second's delay, Samir rushed over to the mosque. Shopkeepers soon followed suit and hurried customers so that they could close their shops and go to the mosque. Soon a wave of people flooded into the already crowded hall.

The lines were formed and the salaat commenced. A beautiful prayer was performed by the Imam of the mosque; so spiritually elevating that it brought tears to many eyes in the crowd. Samir himself felt overwhelmed.

A prayer is known to be the best method of communication with Allah (swt). It is a form of submission to the All-Supreme being who created all there is and all there has been and all there will be.

When worshipping, a person humbles himself by placing his head; the dwelling of human intellect; on the floor below. His posture admitting that all he is and all that he knows is due to the immeasurable blessings of Allah (swt).

Allah is a supreme being. One whose attributes are beyond the perception of the human intellect. Even the most learned philosophers cannot perceive the extent of His greatness. The ability to create a system with such perfection to the minutest details is just a portrayal of His faultlessness. The systems existing at the microcosm levels of cells and atoms resemble the systems at macro levels, like the solar

system, galaxies and ultimately the universe; interacting with one another, dependent on each other, yet maintaining their own entities.

A human is an advanced being with a developed mind and an unparalleled understanding of his surroundings and himself. He is the most superior creation of Allah (swt). However, God has kept the secrets of His existence and the world around him away from the outstretched hands of curiosity; that extend into the realms of the world where knowledge is the key to understand what lies within.

With a loud takbir, the salat was finished. Samir turned and shook hands with the person on his left-hand side; a method of congratulating a fellow Momin on attending the jama'at. However, when he turned to the person on his right, he was surprised to see none other than his friend, Shajeeh.

After greeting each other silently, they stood up and exited the mosque.

“Shajeeh! What brings you here today? I thought you are busy around this time and cannot leave your office.” asked Samir.

Shajeeh laughed and responded, “The same thing which brought you here, a rumbling stomach. I decided to eat out today. Let’s have lunch together. My treat.”

Samir smiled and said, “I’ll join you for lunch but we’ll see about the treat part.”

“Today, Zain has a big soccer match and I am sure you are aware of it, as Ali will be participating as well.”

Shajeeh smiled in acknowledgement.

The two friends strolled down the lane towards the restaurant which had just opened. They walked inside.

They entered in from a glass revolving door and stepped into a large room. All along three of the four walls there were counters and stalls of various food from various places. For example, the stalls included unique dishes from China; a spicy menu from the Subcontinent; sweet

delicacies from Europe; and the simple yet appetizing snack array from the Americas. It provided a lot of variety cooked by distinguished chefs from their respective regions. Famous throughout Peaceville, it was usually a bustling and busy place, but thanks to its efficient staff, it had been able to retain a good reputation all along.



They paid the cashier and picked up their trays. Samir headed towards the Subcontinent region and helped himself to a bowl of spicy curry served with a special flat bread. Shajeeh, however, had a diet for a taste of Oriental food and filled a bowl with long noodles, soaked in a special gravy mixed with herbs, spices and chicken. The two men took a seat at a table in the outside seating area. Underneath the watchful eye of the bright sun, they had their meal. Its aromatic smell filled the air. Samir had just finished when he heard a loud noise. Someone was inside shouting not far from where he and Shajeeh were seated. Both of them turned around to see what the commotion was about.

They saw the head chef and restaurant owner, Syed Abdullah arguing with a group of about ten teenagers, who all looked as though they were around eighteen years old. Samir didn't recognize any of them.

“When you sit in my restaurant, you will behave in a decent manner that is not annoying or offensive to any of my customers. If you have any problem with the rules, you are more than welcome to leave and

eat somewhere where you can shout to your hearts content and no one will care!” Syed said with a clear tone of anger in his voice.

Syed Abdullah was known to be a very polite and decent man who was strict but extremely even-tempered. Therefore, Samir knew that if he was speaking so rudely to these young adults, then he must have a very good reason for doing so.

Syed caught sight of Samir and walked up to him. “Is everything alright, Syed?” Samir asked.

Syed told Samir about the inappropriate behaviour of the group. He also asked for Samir’s help.

Samir got a really good look at the group. It was a mixed one of about five boys and six girls. The boys were dressed shabbily. Some wore baggy slacks with large oversized t-shirts. One wore many pendants that were strung around his neck. The others wore ripped and tattered jeans, covered with chains and had zipped up their torso in a tight and small hoodie. Either their hair was spiked or they wore a cap turned backwards. The girls were no better. Nearly all of them wore slightly tight jeans or leggings. They had small hijabs that practically bordered their make-up dosed faces. Their arms and fingers were adorned with glittery bangles and rings.

The head of the group was a tall lanky boy who eyed Samir and glared at Syed.

Samir turned to Syed, “What happened?”

Syed replied,

“In all my years of business, I have never encountered such a situation before. These insolent young people have pushed me past the limit ...”

“Watch it old man!” yelled the boy.

Samir extended a hand in front of him,

“Now young man.” He spoke very sternly to the boy. “This gentleman is your elder. No matter what the circumstances are, you must respect

those who are older than you and that includes not interrupting them while they speak.”

The boy sheepishly looked away, avoiding Samir’s eyes; slightly shocked, as no one had ever spoken to him that way.

He nodded to Syed.

“For the past hour, since I have returned from the mosque, these children have been extremely loud and blatant, disturbing other customers. Despite multiple polite requests from the members of the staff, they refuse to refrain from this unacceptable behaviour. I have a good mind to report them to the police for causing mischief.”

The group looked in disgust at the old man and then turned to Samir.

Placing a hand on the boy’s shoulder, Samir said in a very gentle voice.

“Son, you have to realise that what you do has an impact on those around you. I understand Syed’s anger; however, I think that it isn’t necessary to contact the police.” He then turned his head towards Syed.

“If you will Syed, pardon them, for my sake, I will be much obliged.”

Syed was surprised. “I would do anything for you, of course if you ask me, how can I refuse?”

Samir nodded. Through the corner of his eye, he could see that what he was saying was not of any use. The girls were sniggering in the back and the boys attempted to hide their smiles. Obviously, they had no intention of changing their behaviour but would make some adjustments for a while.

He nodded to the group and headed back to his table.



Shajeeh was waiting there patiently, fiddling with his cutlery.

“Problem solved?” He asked.

“For now...” Samir responded.

“You know that whatever you were saying was literally going in one ear and out the other.”

Samir nodded in acknowledgement. “I know that too.”

“I don’t know any of them. Are they from Peaceville?”

Samir shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know either but I have a feeling we’re about to find out.”

Shajeeh glimpsed at the watch on his wrist. “That’ll have to wait for now. If we don’t hurry, we’ll be late for the match. Do you need a ride? We could stop at your place to pick up Sonu.”

“Sure, let’s go.”



Chapter 2 - Soccer Setbacks

It was a beautiful day in the town of Peaceville. The sun was shining high in the clear blue sky and the birds were merrily chirping away in their little nests. The peace and calm of the marvellous morning was disrupted by the calls and cheers that came from the leisure centre. Today was no ordinary day – it was the final match of the Elementary League, where Peaceville versed the all-time champions.

Samir sat on the edge of the public steel bench, his eyes locked on the field in front of him. Zain stood in the middle of the field, with a group of boys about his age. He wore a green t-shirt with a white stripe around the edges. With similarly coloured green shorts he also wore matching socks and green studded shoes. On the back of his shirt, the word ‘Captain’ was printed in big white capital letters. His friends were huddled around him as he whispered furtively.

Suddenly, a huge cry came from the overhead speakers, “And that concludes our half time break. For those who have just joined us, I would like to welcome you to the first game of the Elementary Soccer League. Today’s teams are the ‘Zulfiqars of Peaceville’ and the ‘Panthers of Vainville’. Two vigorous competitors competing for a position at the quarter finals! Now, Zulfiqar’s captain, Zain Raza, and his trusted vice-captain, Ali Raza, will take their positions at the centre of the field.”

The Panthers hurriedly rushed across the green ground, arranging themselves in a mesh-like formation. Eyes straight ahead and legs springing with tension, they eagerly waited in anticipation for the shrill whistle of the referee. Their captain, Dawood, glared at Zain, as each captain desired the prize promised for the winner of this match.

Zain and Ali stood face to face in the centre of the field. As their eyes met, they shared a knowing gaze. Ali smiled and nodded and Zain focused on the Astroturf beneath him. At the sound of the referee’s

whistle, he kicked the ball towards Ali. The game was vigorous. Zain's team was smart and sharp, built on coordination and teamwork. The Vainville team was also quite a match. Their players flowing like a river of resistance against them. With only a few minutes left in the game, the two teams had equal scores, adding to the mountain high tension.

Zain swiftly moved through the web of players. He and Ali kept tossing the ball back and forth between each other. They skillfully weaved their way through, handling the ball with their feet. Zain made a break for the goal. The goalie looked at him nervously as Zain barrelled through the empty ground like a rocket. Sweat was dripping down his red face and he was panting hard. Looking hard at the goal, he lifted his leg back to give a huge kick and...BANG!!! Zain felt all the air knocked out of him as he tumbled on to the grass. Gasping for breath, he looked up to see himself surrounded by concerned team mates. The shrill whistle of the coach filled the air. Everyone became silent.



Samir stood up from his place in the stands and hurriedly scanned the fields for any sign of his son. He was just about to transform when he saw a smiling nurse giving a thumbs up to the referee. With a sigh of relief, he sat down once more on the cold seat, but still craned his neck for a view of Zain. Within the next few seconds, Zain emerged from amongst the mob of players.

A loud announcement filled the air once more, "Dawood, captain of the Vainville Panthers just tried to ram down Zain, captain of the Zulfiqars. Dawood gets a yellow card from the referee and the Zulfiqars get one penalty shot. Captain Zain seems a little bruised but he's back on the pitch deciding who will take the penalty shot. That's

determination, folks! Wait, it seems that the Zulfiqar's have decided the penalty shooter. It's Baqir Abbas! A surprising choice from the Zulfiqars. It appears that Zain has chosen the goalie of his team to be the penalty shooter. I don't know what's cooking in this young man's mind but this is going to give the game an interesting end. If Baqir lives up to his captain's expectation, he will score not only a goal, but a position in the league! He looked surprisingly confident for someone who has never been selected for such a position."

Baqir took a deep breath and ran towards the ball. In three short steps, the tip of his shoe slapped the curved leathery surface, sending it screaming through the air. The goalie flung himself to the left, the tip of his fingers brushing the surface of the ball, as it flew into the net.

At first no one moved or spoke, taking in the latest turn of events. Suddenly, the Zulfiqars began to cheer and shout. They were soon joined by the Peaceville spectators. The two teams shook hands and then everyone got ready to go home.

"Baba! Baba! Did you see me today?" Zain threw himself into his father's arms.

Little Sonu began to jump around excitedly. "Yeah, you were going like this...VROOM! And then he pushed you like...BANG! ..."

The two hyper kids rambled on, conversing amongst themselves. Samir lowered Zain and took his gear. Zain caught sight of someone across the field. "I'll be back in a second"

Receiving his father's acknowledgement, he sprinted across the field to where Dawood was boarding a bus, carrying the rest of his team.

Dawood looked up, his tear stained face wore a look of humiliation as he looked down at his gear once more.

"Come to gloat about your victory?"

Zain was slightly taken aback. "No, actually, I just wanted to say... uh You guys were great. It was a good game."

He extended his hand out to Dawood. He looked surprised and slowly took it.

“Yeah, good game. Best of luck in the league. And... I’m sorry about the arm.”

Zain smiled.

“No worries, it’s just a part of the game.”

A call came from inside the bus. “Come on Dawood, I saved you a seat!”

Dawood looked awkwardly at Zain, “See you next season” he said before climbing into the bus.

Zain waved at him and his team mates as the bus drove along.

He looked at the cloud of dust and whispered softly to himself, “Yeah ... next season”.

Ali came running over to Zain. “What was that all about?”

Zain shook his head, “I’ll tell you later.”

Zain was quiet on the drive home. Samir noticed that he appeared to be lost in some melancholy and decided that it would be best to talk when they went home.

When they got back, Hannah laid out a yummy snack. They all went to freshen up. On his way down, Samir stopped by the room that Zain and Sonu shared. Zain was sitting on his bed, silent and lost in his thoughts.

“What did Dawood say that’s troubling you?”

Zain seemed surprised but responded, “I don’t know Baba. Dawood seemed really mean in the match, especially when he tried to ram me, but afterwards, he didn’t seem as bad.”

“You know son, Dawood is a captain. So are you. Do you know why Coach Sadooq made you captain.”

“Because it could help us win.”

“Not exactly – but because he saw in you, the qualities of a leader and more importantly he saw that those qualities were present in the right proportions.”

Zain looked confused so Samir elaborated.

“When Hannah cooks food, she has a bunch of ingredients. For example, some meat, some spices and some oil. Each component is vital for making a good dish. However, when any of these ingredients are too much or too little, the dish gets spoiled. Similarly, there are certain qualities which make someone a leader, however too much or too little of any of them leaves you with a bad leader. And a bad leader can never accomplish the goal. Dawood is a very nice boy. But he is too ambitious.”

“Anxious?”

“No son, ambitious. He wants to win and he wants it so badly that he will step to lowly levels to ensure that it happens. The most important thing in every aspect of life, is that you don’t lose your goodness in the process. Like, if I’m Zain, and I am the captain of the team but I am arrogant or mean to my team mates, do I deserve to be the captain?”

“No...thanks Baba! That answers all my questions!”

He gave his father a big hug and ran downstairs. Samir smiled and brushed away the tear that welled up in his eye. He reached down into his pocket and pulled out a silver locket. It was molded into the shape of a heart. He opened it. On one side was a picture of beautiful smiling young woman. On the other side was a message engraved in silver.

To the lady from whom light emanates.

Never let go of your goodness, no matter how dark the times may be,

For my loving wife, Fatima Samir

Love, Samir

‘We miss you my darling...’ He whispered to himself.



Chapter 3 - Park Predicament

It was a sunny afternoon. Hamza stretched on the long couch of his living room. He felt energetic, but he wasn't really sure what to do. His mother saw him and asked,

“Why don't you take the two children out to the playground? It is a beautiful day and it shouldn't be wasted inside. I'll get some time to myself, and you'll be able to tire yourself out a bit.”

Hamza nodded in agreement. In the next ten minutes, both Laila and Abbas were standing by the door. They followed Hamza and soon reached the playground, which was within walking distance of their home.

He let go of their hands and they ran in to join the other joyful children. Hamza began to stroll on the bordering pavement, keeping a watchful eye on the two. It was a pleasant day. The sun was shining bright and warm in the azure blue sky. A chilly zephyr rushed past,

gently
rustling
the
branches
of the still
plant
giants that
towered
over all
around
them.

With their
tips

brushing the clouds, and their roots delving into the deepest depths, they still bowed with humility under the weight of their burden.

Laden on their branches, were the fruits of their labour. Hamza leaned



against the great form and thanked Allah (Swt) for providing such a beautiful scenery for him to enjoy.

The moment however was short lived. He was returning to the playground to collect his siblings. He had just found Abbas and was looking for Laila. He suddenly caught sight of her on a nearby tall slide. It was about two metres tall and always had a long queue. The children would wait patiently for their turn before climbing to the top and sliding down. Laila had just reached the top and waved to her brother. Hamza smiled and folded his arms, waiting for her to slide down.

Suddenly, out of the blue, a young boy, about ten years old; pushed his way in front of the next person and rushed up the ladder like a monkey. He was a short and squat with a fat face and he was all covered in mud and grass.

“My turn!” he yelled excitedly.

Laila, who was now clinging on to the side rail of the narrow ledge, protested saying that it was her turn and if he wanted to slide down, he had to wait in the queue. But before she could finish, he closed his eyes, screwed up his nose and let out a mighty yell that made everyone in the park turn their heads towards this scene. He then looked angrily at Laila and gave her a big slap across her face.

Laila was shocked and her eyes were filled with tears. She may have been a young girl but she was not a coward and gave him an equally hard slap across his face. For a few seconds, no one moved nor made a sound. The child felt his cheek and then his eyes welled with tears. Before anyone could say or do anything, he gave Laila a mighty shove and pushed her off the slide. Luckily, her brother was standing nearby and managed to catch her before she could fall.

A bunch of Abbas’s friends rushed forward. They all were like brothers to Laila and were very angry to see that a boy pushed their sister.

“Should we beat him up?” they asked Abbas. “We’ll teach him a lesson so he’ll think ten times before hurting our sisters again.”

A few of them gathered at the end of the slide. But then Abbas stopped them.

“We shouldn’t get involved. Let my big brother handle this one. He’ll know best.”

The boys nodded and looked at Hamza. Hamza patted Abbas on the head. He then walked over to the mother who had just arrived to attend to her wailing child. She was a slightly plump lady who wore a large fur coat up to her waist and wore heels as tall as pencils.

She was comforting her son, “What happened? Did Mommy’s precious hurt himself? There, there, come on.”

She gave him her phone and the child’s tears vanished almost instantly. Lifting him off the slide, she placed him on the ground, where he sat down and began to play some games. She then walked over to Hamza.

“Look, I’m sorry. Next time, tell your kid to let him go. That way he won’t hurt anyone.”

She gave them a weak, helpless smile.

Hamza was surprised at her arrogant and unwavering attitude. A woman came and stood beside him. She was the playground supervisor.

“Excuse me Ma’am. I am the playground supervisor and it is my duty to inform you that if you cannot restrain your child then he will not be allowed to enter the playground. I am responsible for the children safety and pleasure and I cannot allow this child to come if he is a bother to other children.”

The lady was shocked by the blunt warning. Her face turned red, much in resemblance to her son. “Just who do you think you are? You cannot stop me. This is a playground and my son and I can come here

whenever we like. My baby is an angel and if certain kids have a problem with it than their parents better deal with it.”

However, the supervisor wasn't going to accept that kind of behaviour. She harshly scolded the lady. Fuming with rage, the bossy lady upped sticks and left.

Hamza turned to thank the supervisor and was surprised to find himself looking at Zahra, his team member. Zahra smiled and gestured to him to give Laila to her.

“Come on darling, let's see your face.” She coaxed the young girl. Taking Laila to the nearby spring she washed her red face and wiped away her tears.

“Now that's much better. All smiley and shiny again.” Laila smiled and let out a little giggle.

“Off you go!” Zahra told her and Laila ran off to her friends.

Hamza walked over.

“Thank you, Zahra.”.

Zahra smiled. “It's alright, it's my job to handle these situations.”

“Since when are you working here?” he asked.

“Oh, this isn't my actual job. It's more of a volunteer task. I love children and nothing pleases me more than helping them.”

Hamza nodded. “Who was that lady? I know that I haven't been in Peaceville for a quite a while, but I don't remember any one like her.”

Zahra shrugged her shoulders, “I haven't got a clue.”

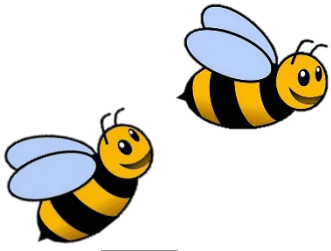
Hamza realized that it was getting late. He thanked Zahra and swiftly collected his brother and sister.

Laila was feeling a little guilty. “Hama” she called. It was her nickname for Hamza. She used to call him that when she was too small to say his name properly.

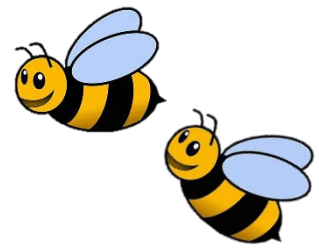
Hamza looked at her. “What is it Laila?”

“Should I have hit that boy? He was wrong to hit me, but since I hit him too, doesn’t that make me wrong as well?”

“Laila what you did was fine. He was a rude child and you gave an appropriate response. If he had been younger and didn’t know any better than it would be different. But he was old enough to know that he can’t hit and bully other kids. What you did was right and there is absolutely no need to feel guilty about it.”



Chapter 4 - Busy Bees



It was a beautiful Monday morning. The sun was twinkling high in the sky and the grass waved in the gentle zephyr, greeting those who passed by. However, the calm exterior did not reflect the hustle bustle echoing inside every house of Peaceville. This week was no ordinary week. It was the examination week for all the schools in the district; and also the meeting week for corporations all across the state. Not to mention, it was the week of the summer sales and all shops had opened their doors to their eager female consumers.

That panicky epidemic had affected almost every household and Samir's home was no different. Hannah was attending to the children. There was much to do and very little time. In one hour, she woke up the children, got them washed and tidied, ironed their uniforms, packed Zain's bag with all his exam equipment, revised his lessons with him, cooked the breakfast, prepared the children's lunch boxes and had Samir's coat, phone and lunch waiting for him by the door.

Samir, too, was very busy when he went to the office. He had meetings with important foreign business partners from overseas. He had to make sure that all arrangements were finalized, like accommodations, etc. He also had to revise and finalise some business propositions. His staff was rushing around. During these days, his office door remained wide open so that he could easily communicate with his busy but hardworking staff.

Zahra and Amina were furiously revising their curriculum as the most important examinations were coming up. Should they do well, they would pass into institutes for higher studies and hopefully achieve their goals.

For Amina, this was a very important week. It was on the Wednesday of this week that she had lost both of her parents and her two siblings in a car crash. Amina was in school and her two younger siblings and

parents were on their way to a doctor's appointment. Amina was eight years old when it happened. Zahra's mother, her maternal aunt took her niece under her wing and had told her nine-year-old daughter that Amina was no longer her cousin, in fact she was her younger sister. From that time on, the girls grew up to be soul mates.

She spent the entire evening at their graves reciting Quran and prayers. Despite her composure, her young age still revealed a hurt heart that was soothed by her companion, her cousin, her sister and her life-long friend; Zahra.

Huda was particularly occupied not only at work but at home as well. Her younger brother was coming over to visit; with his wife and son. Huda was eager to spend time with the three, but was also attempting to balance the crazy week's work at her several offices.

Shajeeh was working with his team to open a window of opportunity for them. His team's job was to design ideas for their clients who approved them. His team had boxes upon boxes of genius technological advances, waiting to be discovered and acknowledged.



Chapter 5 - New faces

Amina was busy putting away her books in her locker. She stretched her stiffed arms and then looked around for a place to sit. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw three girls. In an instant, she knew they were from abroad. They were dressed differently and had foreign accents. However, they seemed lost. The friendly side of Amina pushed her to go to them.

“Salaams, I’m Amina.” She introduced herself.

One of the girls stuck her nose in the air and replied quite haughtily, “Hello, I am Nazgul. Pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“This is Mira, my cousin.” continued Nazgul, gesturing to the girl on her left. She looked much nicer. Mira was quite plump with small twinkling eyes that sat atop a large dimpled smile. She shook Amina’s hand energetically.

Nazgul ended by introducing the girl on her right. “And this is Sanya, a family friend.” Sanya was quite different from her two partners. She was a gentle bespectacled girl who had a thin figure and moved with such delicacy as if she was made of glass. Judging by the large number of factual books in her arms, Amina could tell she was an avid reader.

She nodded shyly in greeting.

“Are you new here?” asked Amina.

Sanya nodded. “When we arrived the – “

But she was swiftly cut off by Nazgul, “We had just entered when we realized –”

“I am sorry to interrupt you Nazgul, but I believe Sanya was saying something.” Amina interfered.

Nazgul wore a wry look on her face, Mira was struggling to stifle a laugh, but didn’t dare after receiving one of Nazgul’s cold stares.

Sanya was surprised.” W-W-Well when we arrived t-t-the reception was c-closed. We didn’t know where to go.”

Amina smiled. “I have about an hour before my next class. Would you like it if I gave you a tour? I can show you around.”

Sanya’s eyes lit up. “Would you? That would be absolutely splendid!”

After spending one hour with the girls, Amina got a fair idea of their personalities.

Nazgul was a rich young lady with a heavy purse and an even heavier ego. Her parents ran a car manufacturing company. She was arrogant and proud but was very fond of her cousin, Mira.

Mira, on the other hand, was the complete opposite. She was loud and bubbly, and always had a joke to tell, or a trick up her sleeve. She was a lovable girl with a doll-like appearance. Unlike her cousin, she was very warm and welcoming in her attitude and expressions.

Sanya was a shy but sweet, quaint girl. She lived in her world of books and fantasies. According to the other two girls, she loved reading. She was particularly withdrawn in Nazgul’s presence, but hung around because Mira was her only friend.

Soon, they caught up with Zahra. After quick introductions, they spent the rest of the break together before heading towards their classes. The group thanked them politely and they parted ways.

That night, the girls stayed up late; talking.

“I don’t like Nazgul.” replied Amina while straightening her bedsheets. “I think she’s mean and arrogant.”

Zahra looked up from her science book, “Amina, remember you can’t be judgmental. In fact, I think she is like you in a lot of ways.”

Amina stood their jaw dropped, “Me and Nazgul? Alike? Are you crazy?”

“In defense of what I said, she is quick to reply just like you!” winked Zahra, in a teasing way.

The next day Zahra woke up at the merry chirping of the birds outside her window. It was a beautiful day although a few grey clouds obscured the brilliance of the overhanging blue sky. Slowly, she climbed out of her bed and stretched her stiffed arms. She glimpsed over at Amina in the neighbouring bed and shook her head. Amina was still sleeping.

Zahra looked at the time and realized that she should probably start getting ready for school. She could hear her mother working in the kitchen and was glad to know that she wasn't the only one awake. As quietly as she could, she tiptoed over to her closet and pulled out a set of clean clothes. Within the next few minutes, she washed her face and got dressed.

Amina heard the clattering in the washroom and lazily opened one eye. "What's going on?"

Her eyes then drifted to the large alarm clock on the side table and she nearly jumped in surprise. "I'm gonna be late!" she cried. Zahra stifled a laugh as she adjusted her hijab in the usual perfect manner.

Amina was rushing back and forth to gather the parts of her uniform along with her badge.

"I can't wait till exams are over" panted Amina as they ran down the lane.

Zahra nodded in agreement.

Chapter 6 - A series of strange events

Like the disappearance of a storm cloud from the sky, the week passed taking with it, all the hustle bustle that it had caused.

By afternoon, the city was quiet.

Life continued on. Today, there was a congregation in the mosque. The crowd squeezed inside its vast halls. As a large but close bunch, the town's population wore smiles as they saw faces of friends and family ignored during the previous week.

After the afternoon prayers, Mr. Abidi took his place on the pulpit.

“I have a few announcements to make. First and foremost, I would like to congratulate students of all ages for their diligence and hard work in preparation for the state examinations. May Allah (Swt) accept your struggle Inshallah. Remember, your struggle is not for the attainment of this world and its limited possession. We strive for proximity to the power which has no end, the power which is infinite. We strive to seek nearness to our Lord, Allah (swt) and Inshallah, we will achieve that.”

A loud “Inshallah” echoed from the crowd.

Mr. Abidi smiled and continued, “I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that:

Ms. Fatima , a fine teacher in one of our Peaceville schools has gotten engaged. We wish that Allah (swt) grant the new couple; prosperous life, as these two set out on a journey together.”

Hannah smiled and turned around to scan the face of the crowd. Ms. Fatima was Zain's new teacher. She caught sight of her, blushing amidst her giggling and teasing friends.

Samir smiled too. He didn't know Ms. Fatima too well, but had met her several times in parent-teacher meetings. He found her to be a

confident, intelligent young lady with a special way with children. He prayed a silent dua in his heart for her happiness and prosperity.

After the crowd had calmed down and quieted, Mr. Abidi related the second piece of news.

“I have received complaints from individuals regarding a string of vandalism that has occurred in the past few days. These involved building walls, public spaces and public equipment such as the children playgrounds. Obscene messages with inappropriate language and vulgar remarks as well as the damaging of equipment occurred, rendering it useless. On behalf of the management, we will impose a fine on anyone who is caught doing such acts. If caught, they must not only compensate for the damage they have caused but also serve in the community on a designated role. Believe me, it does not cost much to wash away paint or to replace a broken swing, but the question is why should it be done? Why should a person damage a service provided to them? If anyone has any information regarding who is responsible; please inform the related authorities. Thank you all for attending and may Allah (swt) grant you a prosperous and productive week.”

With that, the congregation ended. People happily engaged in lively chatter and some in hushed whispers. Samir, on the other hand, was busy thinking.



His instincts told him that there was some relation between the group he saw at the restaurant and the vandalizers. The city had never had such a problem before. Also, he never saw them in the mosque or any other social place. They were usually seen laughing together in some restaurant or as pairs in the park. He felt the need to inform the team. He pulled out his phone and sent a simple message to a chat group.

“Tomorrow, 1 pm. The office, please.”

From across the hall, he saw Shajeeh. After reading the message on his phone, he met Samir’s gaze and nodded. Slowly, they made their way out and walked home. Without exchanging another glance, Shajeeh mounted the bus and Samir sat in his car. They knew they would get a chance to talk about everything, tomorrow afternoon.

The next day set off to a chilly start with a slight chill whistling around the town. There had been slivers of rain in the night but the sky had cleared by daybreak. The sun rose high in the sky, its colourful wings staining the blue with streaks of its fiery appearance. All those lucky enough to see such a spectacular scene would be held in its trance for hours. As the dawn approached, life stirred in the quiet city. In the forest, the wildlife was already rushing about between the lush vegetation. Squirrels and birds sounded the morning symphony; while more shy creatures like deer, took to the quieter grassland in the clearing.

Shajeeh swung open his window and took in a deep breath of fresh air. His house was over by the sea, and he had a marvellous view of the sky blue waters from his bedroom window. He had watched the sun rise from the horizon some innumerable times but never did he tire of seeing its marvellous entrance.

His wife woke up and smiled to see her husband, staring wide eyed at the colourful display. Gently, without making a sound, she picked up a sweater from the coat rack and draped it on his shoulders. Shajeeh suddenly became aware of her presence and greeted her.

“Salaam dear. I didn’t notice that you had woke up. Is it too chilly? Should I close the window?”

His wife laughed. “And break your ten-year streak? No dear, leave it open, enjoy. For ten years I have watched you rise each morning without fail to catch a glimpse of the sunrise. I wouldn’t want to stop you from seeing such a sight. I’ll go and make breakfast. Come on down when you are ready.”



She smiled and went to the bathroom.

Shajeeh laughed to himself. At that moment, a little bird flew by and landed on his window sill.

It was a robin. It stared at Shajeeh from the other side of the window sill, its head tilted sideways in a comical manner. Shajeeh stretched out his hand and the tame bird hopped into it. It began to chirp a little song. He pulled out a pack of breadcrumbs and dried seeds that his wife always kept near the window so that she could feed the birds whenever she desired. He pulled out a few and dropped them in a little neat heap. The bird looked cautiously at him, then the food and then at Shajeeh again. It then hopped over and warily pecked at a few

distant crumbs. Seeing that it was something nice, it began to enjoy and called on a few more from the flock to join in.

His gaze was broken by his wife's call. Breakfast was ready. He went down the stairs and into the small, decent dining room.

His dreary eyed, sleepy son was already seated at the table. With her usual impressive speed and efficiency, his wife had laid out a most delicious spread. Fried eggs just off the cooker steamed beside an array of jams and cheese, whilst a garden of salad sprouted from the nearby container. To wash it all down, there was a selection of juices; lemonade as well as a large pitcher of water.

After saying 'Bismillah' they began.

He began to relate his schedule to his wife.

"After the office, I have an important meeting. You will have to do the pick up from school. I may be late so don't wait for me at dinner."

His wife nodded and then began to clear away the dirty dishes. Shajeeh assisted her and between the two of them, they cleared the table. Then they went upstairs to get ready for their diurnal chores.

Shajeeh was soon ready as his wife had his clothes pressed. He had always marvelled her efficiency and multitasking. Soon, they got in their little car. Shajeeh arrived at the office and was greeted by a hyperactive member of his team. He wore an ear-to-ear smile and wouldn't stop for a moment.

"Shajeeh! you won't believe this! Your paper was approved. We've got the dealers flying in this weekend! Isn't it amazing?"

Shajeeh soon joined him. He had been working on the design of an environmental friendly solar energy supply with the same efficiency as the sources they currently used. At first, the committee didn't approve. Then he had spent years revising his plans until now. He rushed in to prepare a suitable presentation with his team.

Mukhtar was just as busy. He was working with Hamza on a youth program designed to guide the youth regarding their future plans. It

was a scheme designed to assist them in seeking opportunities like those for higher education, work experience and so on.

After work, they drove down to the office.

They found Huda there, setting up and they assisted until the arrival of the other members. Amina and Zahra were last to arrive.

They took a seat on the chairs at the back of the hall.

Samir began.

“In the name of Allah (Swt), the most Merciful, the most Beneficent.

I assume that you are all aware of the various new issues that are arising in our city. First, and foremost, is this issue of vandalism. I don’t understand what has caused it to start but I know how it will end.”

Amina’s brow burrowed deep as it creased her forehead. “Is this really such a big issue? I mean if you travel to other metropolitan areas, it is quite common.”

Samir smiled and replied, “But we are not like any other city.”

Mukhtar leaned over and whispered into Hamza’s ear, “He’s going to make a speech, isn’t he?”

Hamza nodded in agreement.

Samir continued, “We implement the morals and values of Islam with dedication, commitment and loyalty. It doesn’t matter what happens elsewhere but what’s important is that we don’t lose what we have here.”

He then narrated the incident at the restaurant.



“I feel that there is some connection between this group of teenagers and our suspected vandalizers.”

On this point, Zahra’s eyes widened but she said nothing.

For her, the rest of the meeting was a blur. The gears in her brain raced at top speed as Samir’s statement seemed to have chained together some idling thoughts in her head.

She stood up, “Please excuse me. There is something I need to attend to.”

Amina looked surprised. “Do you need me to come with you?”

She shook her head. After saying farewell, she left.

Chapter 7 - The perplexing puzzle

Zahra zoomed down the empty streets of Peaceville. She gripped the handles as she flew down the lanes to the suburbs of the city. Her route led her to an abandoned moor.

Zahra pulled up at the start of the moor. She gently stepped off her bicycle and laid it down on the ground. A desolate scene lay before her.

The sky was dark and moody, clothed in a blanket of nimbostratus clouds that veiled the clear blue sky above it. The ground stretched as far as the eye could see. Brown dust whipped about in the ice chilly wind that whistled about the empty, barren plains. A few tumbleweeds rolled about fulfilling the sole purpose of their plain existence.

The place always creeped out Zahra, but today, no such thought enveloped her mind. Could it be the change of objective from the last time she was here? Allah (swt) knows!

She wandered down a weather-beaten track to a bushel of shrubs that were clumped together on the ground. Zahra reached in, grabbed them and yanked them with all the force she could muster.

The bushel gave a loud groan and flew open to reveal a hollow passage. With a smile, she jumped in.

Zahra felt the air whoosh around her as she slid down. Lights flashed by as she waited patiently for her destination. Then suddenly, the metal beneath her disappeared and she landed on a thin mattress.

She looked around and took in the familiar and unnerving surroundings. With a deep breath, she walked up to the clean whiteboard and pulled out a new marker from her pocket. The eerie squeak of her writing echoed through the hollow space.

1. Group of boys and girls caused trouble at Agha Abdullah's restaurant due to insolence and noise.

2. Laila, Hamza's sister, get slapped by a boy at the park.
3. Amina's new acquaintances have conflicting personalities and ideals.

She stood back to look at the three points.

“Where is the link?” she thought.

A deafening silence echoed in her ears. Suddenly, she heard a voice, “They're not from Peaceville.”

Zahra swerved around, poised and ready to defend. A familiar silhouette walked into the dim light.

“None of the people you have put up there have been in Peaceville for a long time.” Said Amina.

Zahra looked surprised, “How did you figure that out?”

“If those people had been from Peaceville, Brother Samir would have known them. He's lived here his entire life. Those three girls told me they were new. Plus, look what Sanya showed me...”

Zahra looked at the photo on Amina's phone. It was an official letter.

Dear Sanya,

We would like to congratulate you on your acceptance into the Joint Vainville and Aggressville Scholarship program (JVAS). Your program includes a full scholarship for high school at Peaceville Junior High. Please contact Ms. Jodah by the 7th of May for further details.

Regards,

*Grants and scholarships department,
JAVA (Joint Aggressville and Vainville Associates)*

Chapter 8 - Reluctance and Resistance

The next meeting of the team was a very serious one. The issue which apparently looked subtle and insignificant could have drastic effects on the community. Zahra and Amina had connected the dots in locating the source of the problem.

Shajeeh had used his resources to discover that a group of five families had moved from outside. There were eight to nine teenagers, and about three kids (under 15) along with the adults. These two families had migrated from places like Aggressville and Vainville etc. These places had cultural values which did not sync with those of Peaceville.

When individuals from different cultures and moral values interact and line alongside each other, two things are very important:-

1. There should be mutual respect and tolerance for those who are different
2. Pride in who you are and learned about why you are who you are.

Both aspects are extremely important . Integration should be done on the format of a bouquet made of various types of flowers. Each flower has its own fragrance, colours and individuality. Yet when placed alongside others, the overall picture is that of a beautiful bouquet.

Samir and the team valued the set of ethics in Peaceville community as the community of Peaceville has its basis on the teachings of the Ahlebait (as). The dream was to build a community which could prepare a generation of those who could serve the Imam (as) of the time. Having people with conflicting moral values immigrating to Peaceville was not a trivial thing. It could have an impact on the community at large.

The team chalked out a plan. The families were to be placed in quarantine, unknowingly. Those who could amalgamate without

causing problems would be worked upon and those who can't, would be forced to leave.

The responsibilities were divided. Everyone understood the plan. They all recited 2 rakaats salaah-e-hajat and then decided to disperse with the next meeting scheduled for after two weeks.

Chapter 9 - Eventful Evenings

The next two weeks were very eventful. The first family was Ramiz's. Three in total: one husband, one wife and one son (the same one who misbehaved in the park). Huda was assigned the job. The team realized that the problem was the mother. If they could fix the thought process of the mother, the child would not be a problem.

Huda decided to get her engaged in carefully designed parenting programs in the mosque. Huda prepared the presentation focusing and emphasising on various facts backing it up with official statistics from neutral authentic sources.

The parenting workshops and seminars were organised under the guidance of authentic scholars who could influence the audience. Question and answer sessions followed the speeches.

Mizna's thought process was clearly changing; earlier than Huda anticipated. After a couple of sessions as per her planning, Huda decided to put Mizna to test.

She planned a mum and kid party in a community center. Faraz Ramiz, the son; was also there. Faraz tried to snatch a prize won by another kid. Huda took the child and his mum to Mrs. Ramiz to complain about Faraz.

After listening to the complaint, the first pleasant surprise was the unexpected apology extended by Mrs. Ramiz. She then turned towards her son.

“Did you take this from the little girl?” she asked.

Faraz replied, “Now it's mine!”

Mrs. Ramiz was quick to respond “No its not. Please return it back to her and say ‘sorry’”.

Faraz was shocked, “But mom-”

Mrs. Ramiz was cool, “Right now or else there will be consequences. Your new bike will be confiscated.”

Faraz was not ready to accept that. He instantly obeyed.

“Sorry, here, you can have it back. ”

Mrs. Ramiz said, “Good boy, I’m pleased with you.”

Huda did not have time to wait more. She was very delighted.

‘The Ramiz family will be a positive addition to our community, Inshallah’, Huda thought.

The second family was the responsibility of Shajeeh. Mr. Saad was a single parent who had a teenage son named Asad. Asad was an academic genius. He had particular interests in computers. He was one of the boys in the restaurant, not very active; but mainly a tagalong.



Shajeeh found from his academic institute that he was a very good student though a little restless but almost always ahead of his peers. Shajeeh thought of a plan. Although there was a risk, he decided to give it a go.

As per his plan, with the permission of the principal, Shajeeh announced an advance course in computer programming. As the bait was rightly placed, the young boy fell right into the trap. Of course, all was done with good intention.

Asad was one of the first ones to apply and was selected right away. In the next ten days, with the help of the course; Shajeeh realized that Asad was very energetic and needed something that could challenge him. He needed an activity to match his caliber.

Shajeeh designed the course to meet the objectives and included principles of faith wherever it was possible. With his mind enjoying the academic side of the course, Asad started responding positively to the moral and religious teachings as well. In just ten days, there was a huge change in his behaviour. He topped in the final project which

was to design a computer game in which 313 challenges had to be met to be part of the team of Imam e Zamana (ajtf). Asad's game was very interesting and clearly indicated his skills.

Shajeeh felt immense pleasure at the end of the course. Asad's new group of friends were from pious families of Peaceville.

“This kid can do wonders if we can channel his energy properly.” Shajeeh thought.

The next family included three brothers who lived in a huge multifamily house. They had six teenagers in the family.

Mukhtar and Samir teamed up to take care of this bigger group. This group was the main trouble lot. After frequent observations, Samir realized that there was a ring leader amongst them.

Safeer was the only son of the elder brother. He had two sisters who spoiled him. Safeer was clearly off the track. He did wrong for no reason and instigated others to do that too. The others always followed him as if he was the undeclared leader. Safeer was not very interested in studies. The dilemma was that his father, Mr. Arif, was quite pious. It was a difficult situation.

Samir and Mukhtar came up with an interesting plan. ‘Caught red handed’ was the title of the plan.

For the next week, Samir followed him everywhere, of course in his bird form. As soon as Safeer did something wrong, Samir would call the cops.

They didn't have to wait long. The first incident was at the public park. It was about midnight when Samir's phone buzzed on his side table. At first, he thought he was dreaming, but after the second and third ring, he was sure that it was real.

It was Mukhtar.

"Hello" mumbled Samir, almost falling asleep again.

"Project 'Caught red-handed' has been initiated. I repeat, project 'Caught red-handed' has been initiated. The package is on the move. Location is sector 7, segment 4."

"Huh?" Now Samir was wide awake - but hadn't been able to make a head or a tail of Mukhtar's coded message.

"The boys are at the park." Mukhtar's tone was flat and slightly disappointed.

"Oh. I'm on my way."

Before long, Samir set off.

Peaceville was still. The black abyss of darkness had swallowed up the light like a ravenous animal. The enigmatic emptiness of the night sky had flooded into the street, lit by a few street lamps. The leaves rustled eerily, singing the lost song of the morose wind that howled through the trees. The wet playground equipment creaked uncannily as the swings, absentmindedly, moved forward and back. To any person, it was scary and devoid of life. But to a bird, it was beautiful.

The tall branches of the trees reached out to Samir as he sliced through the darkness of the night. His powerful eyes pierced the nebulous hollow void before him. Although the world heard silence; to him, the air was filled with a symphony of music. The trees secretly spoke amongst one another while the crickets and the frogs filled the air with whistles and croaks; accompanied by the growling of some hidden creature, lurking within the dense foliage.

These were the few moments where Samir felt true awe – as to the beauty that was hidden from the eyes of humanity. It was these secrets he kept to himself, an entrustment upon his soul. He could find nothing better to do but praise and thank his Lord for removing the veil from his eyes.

As he hovered over the playground, one of the streetlamps shone a little more brightly and dimmed again. To any passerby, it was nothing more than a mere power surge. But to Samir, it was a code. It meant Mukhtar was hidden in one of the adjacent buildings and was waiting for the signal.

It was hardly a few minutes before they arrived. Their sloppy looks, ruffed up clothes and mischievous grins spelt one word; trouble. Safeer was at the head of the gang, swinging a large cricket bat carelessly in his hand. Around his waist was a belt, loaded with spray cans.

Safeer's eyes scanned the playground, looking for a large clear space. Then he saw the information board and smiled. The rest of the hooligans needed no further instructions. His friends proceeded to knock over the bins. Safeer had just removed a can of green spray paint but the second his finger rested on the nozzle, a loud screech echoed through the air. Startled, the can slipped from his frozen fingers and noisily clattered on the ground. The smirks had been wiped clean from his friends' faces. Suddenly, one flashed a light straight at Samir.

“Come on guys...” he exclaimed. “It’s just a stupid bird.”

Safeer turned to where his friend pointed and saw a large owl with huge, piercing blue eyes, feathers as white as snow and a beak as black as the night around them.

Safeer smiled and picked up the can. The sounds of yells and whoops echoed around him, as he steadied his shaking hands. But once again he was stopped as a boy from the group shouted to them.

They froze and suddenly a piercing noise of wailing sirens filled the air.

“Guys, it’s the cops!”

They dropped everything they were holding and fled down the street.

Safeer's heart was thumping so loudly in his chest that he could feel the deafening pounding his ears. His mind as numb as his legs carried him down the street at an amazing speed. Covered in sweat, and completely exhausted, Safeer was panting rather loudly. None of them stopped till they made their way home.

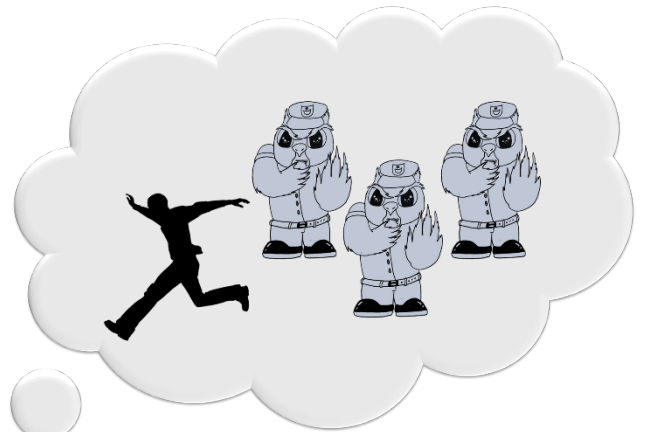
He slipped up the flower frame below his bedroom window and adeptly tiptoed into the dark room. He managed to change his clothes and make it into the bed without a sound.

Breathing deeply and slightly in shock, Safeer lay still in his bed. It was a few moments before his head became a little lighter.

“Oh my God. That was freaky. I just can't believe it. We were nearly caught! That's never happened before. Lucky, one of the guys was on lookout. But how did the cops find out?”

The swirling thoughts lulled his head into a disturbed sleep where he spent the whole night running on a spray paint can as he tried to escape a team of owl police officers.

The police officers searched the entire area but found out that no major damage was caused. The head officer watched with sharp eyes as his men quickly cleaned up whatever litter lay on the ground. A junior officer came to him. His hands filled with a bundle of papers.



“Apart from the knocked over bins, no other damage is done. A spray can is also found, sir. It looks like they were not able to do anything. Regarding the caller, sir, it was a male, but that was all our analyst could deduce from the audio feed.”

The head nodded and then he called his men to retreat.

Samir and Mukhtar met up later to congratulate themselves on a job well done.

The next time it was Samir who called Mukhtar.

“They’re heading to the back of the industrial warehouses.”

Mukhtar’s face wore an expression of confusion as he hurriedly pulled on a t-shirt. He hastily put the phone to his ear, “How do they plan on getting inside? It’s a secured area.”

Samir replied quickly, “They’re not trying to get inside. They’re vandalizers, not thieves. They’re probably going to try and ruin the walls, and if they are feeling daring, they might try and damage some equipment. That area is also distant from the city – it’s going to be hard for the police to make it there.”

“For a bunch of vandalizers, Samir, they’re very smart.”

“Wasted talent. Look at what they are doing compared to what they could have been doing.”

“I’m on my way.”

“See you there, Inshallah”

Safeer and his gang waited anxiously behind a tall stack of crates. The security guard hummed merrily as he put away his things. He called out to the night guard who was just beginning his patrol.

“See you in the morning, Inshallah; Abd Rahman, I’m off. Allah Hafiz!”

Abd Rahman waved back and then entered one of the many warehouses. As soon as they were out of sight, the boys leapt out and ran as silently as they could to the back of the neighboring empty warehouse.

The large building threw a big shadow on the hard cement ground. They stuck in the dark and crept along the side until they reached the spot. One of them leant down and opened a rucksack. He began to pass out the spray cans. They were slightly apprehensive; especially after their recent encounter with the police.

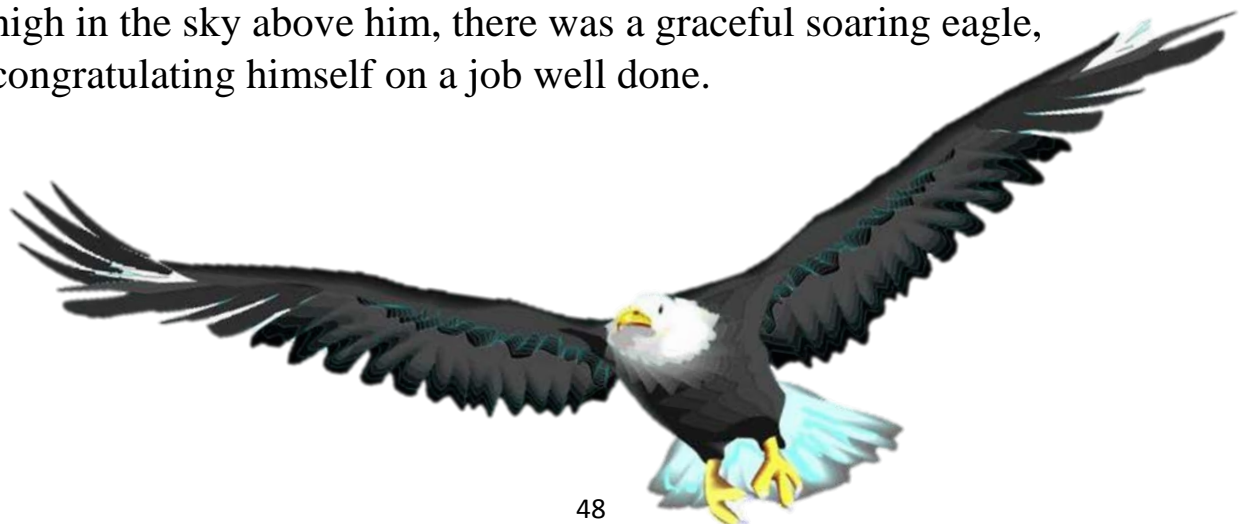
Safeer went to the fence. It was his turn to keep lookout. The back led to a road which was bordered by a forest leading to the suburbs of Peaceville. His eyes scanned the road as he nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the next. Suddenly, something caught his eye. A small pair of brilliant blue irises were glaring at him. He could have sworn that they looked familiar. They were small but deep. Safeer shifted forward and found himself looking at a tall, strong goose. Suddenly, the bird turned its head in the direction of the road and Safeer was shocked to see a faint set of red and blue lights. He ran to his group and between breathless gasps, managed to convey that the police were on their way. Hurriedly, the boys squeezed through a small hole in the fence and ran across the road into the forest.

The boys ran until they were safely away.

“Phew! That was a close one.” Panted one of the older boys. “Don’t know how they do it, but they won’t get so close next time.”

“Next time?” A breathless Safeer turned towards them and yelled. “Are you crazy? Twice, we’ve just missed being thrown in juvenile jail. It’s like someone knows where we are going to be. If that’s the case, then I don’t want to be a part of it. I don’t want to get caught; and you know what, that’s what’s happening. I quit”

Safeer threw down his bat, and so did many of the other boys. As he trudged through the foliage he felt that someone was watching him. As he passed by a large tree and step out onto a pavement he pretended like he didn’t know and continued, every now and then glimpsing nervously over his shoulder. What he didn’t know, was that high in the sky above him, there was a graceful soaring eagle, congratulating himself on a job well done.

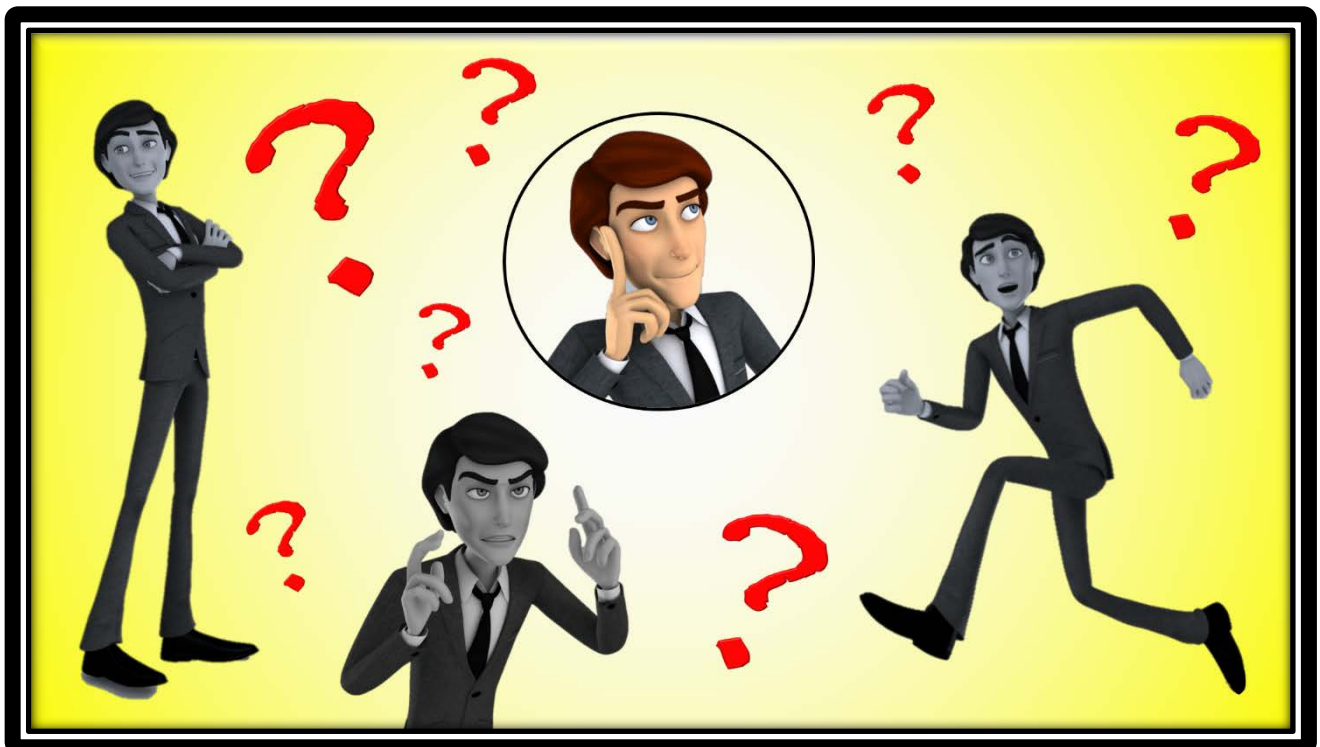


Sneak Peek!



Book 10

The Real me...



For once, Samir was not flying through night skies, or dodging buildings and telephone wires. He went to work, came back, and spent time with his family, like any other citizen of Peaceville. But rumours spread like wildfire that Samir has changed. He is no longer the man he used to be. His family, elders, workers and team mates can't understand why this change has taken place. All they know is that they wish it hadn't.

What's going on with the secret superhero?

Find out in Book 10,

‘THE REAL ME...’

PUBLISHED SO FAR:

'The Messengers'

Book 1 - Superhero or superman?

Book 2 - Superhero at play!

Book 3 - Are there more like me?

Book 4 - Little things...Big Impact!

Book 5 - Peek a boo! I know you!

Book 6 - Respite after Spite

Book 7 - Sugar-coated evil

Book 8 - Magnetic Muddle!

Book 9 - Concept Conundrum

Website: www.asr313.com

Email: asr.313@hotmail.com

Facebook: Asr Kids





An influential group of Peaceville citizens return home after spending years abroad...

The difference in their ideological and social beliefs causes a discrepancy in the lives of many, including the team members themselves...

How will the team tackle this new problem and take a stand against the unwelcomed values threatening the community?

Is the problem as simple as it looks???



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