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The Crown Of Faith

SAAD RIAZUDDIN

MIST NY
1st
Short Fiction

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It was freezing as I ran briskly in the wind. I felt the urge to look back as I was running to see if he was catching up. Maybe I was finally receiving my punishment from Him. Will He have mercy on me now that it's all over for me? I felt like I lost all sense of feeling and emotion. I felt myself shivering---not because of the cold, but because of this feeling, this fear I had---of Him. I knew it was too late now; there was no going back. There was no use of changing into one of *them*, or should I say, what I used to be. He was catching up to me; I could hear him breathing, gasping for air. I tried to imagine his agonized, pain-stricken face. I stopped running; it was too late to ask for forgiveness, not only from him but more importantly from *Him*. I stood there for a second as I waited for him to catch up, but that second seemed liked hours of pain. Not just because everything was over; but because I saw my painful life flashing before my eyes, slowly and dramatically....

I was running, but this time not of fear, but of happiness. I was 10 years old and lived in New York in a small house with a farm. I was laughing and running with my best friend, Ghali Diyari, whom I was very close with. We treated each other as real brothers and we did almost everything together. We were playing tag and I was "it"; we were running through the corn fields on my farm. The corn fields were huge, almost 6 feet tall. It was hard for us to run through the fields, but somehow we ran fast, with hardly any strength at all.

I was dashing through the corn field smiling and could not help but crack up. Ghali called me from behind, "I'll get you Taj al-Din! You're not as fast as I am!" I glanced behind my shoulder and I was surprised to see him about 4 feet behind me, catching up real quick. I stuck my tongue out at him foolishly to which he smiled and started running even faster. I ran through the field quicker, moving the big amount of corn that was scratching away my face. But I continued to laugh, because

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often, happiness covers pain. I dashed through the fields faster and faster until suddenly I got tired. I stopped running and tried to grasp for air. I knew I was going to lose; Ghali was a lot faster.

I looked up in the sky as I waited for him to catch up. I looked at the sun, which was shining bright. The sun always made me smile and made my mood bright. Whenever I was in a bad mood I would always look up at the sky to see how wondrous it was, marveling at its color and warmth. Just then I started thinking about *Him*, the Creator, the Lord of the universe, the Most Merciful of mankind, Allah. My mom would always tell me how we should show loyalty towards Him because of everything He gave us. I whispered softly, moving my tongue slowly and steadily while smiling, “Thank you Allah, for everything you gave me.”

Just then I felt someone poke me lightly on the shoulder. I turned around to see Ghali, smiling. “You lose Taj! Sorry!”

I smiled back. “Oh, well. This is the last time that’s happening. Just wait until next time!”

We went inside to pray. Unlike Ghali, I knew how to pray entirely and I even prayed 5 times a day. I would always try teaching Ghali, but he would often forget, so I told him to follow me when I would pray and to try his best to repeat what I said. My parents were really religious and took their religion, Islam, seriously. They would tell me stories of the prophets when I was younger and taught me how to pray when I was 8. Unlike my parents, Ghali’s parents were different in many ways. Ghali’s parents were more concerned with his academic studies more than anything else, including religion. In fact, Ghali knew almost nothing about Islam until my mom started teaching him a few years ago.

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“Get up! I said get up!” I looked behind my seat to see a tall teenager, about the age of 15, facing eye to eye with Ghali. Ghali and I were on the school bus going home. I was in the seat in front of where Ghali was sitting. Ghali, looking frightened, asked, “Did I do something?”

The boy replied harshly, “Don’t be stupid kid. You’re a Muslim. Your religion is all about hate and evil. Go worship Satan in the country you came from. You don’t deserve to live in America, the country of peace.” Ghali looked terrified, as if he just saw death in his own eyes. I leaped out my seat, quietly. I stood up behind him standing face to face with the back of his head.

I tapped him on the shoulder and cleared my throat. “Islam is the religion of peace, you got it wrong,” I said, firmly. I quickly pushed my fingers close together to make a fist. I moved it to the same level as the boy’s head, and I punched the back of his head the hardest I could.

They all yelled at me. My parents were disappointed in me for contradicting what I said, telling the boy that Islam was the religion of peace while punching him a moment after. They told me that the kid most likely had a misunderstanding because of what he may have heard from the news or from his parents. They told me that the only thing I accomplished by punching him was affirming his belief, that Islam was not a religion of peace. “Patience is the key, Taj, not frustration,” my dad said, while holding up the Quran. “Follow Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He kept patience to the extent that even the people who hated him believed. He brought peace to this world. It’s our job to help spread this peace in the same manner he did, with patience.”

Ghali’s parents didn’t take it so well. Because of that incident, many different things happened. Ghali’s parents assumed that the school and neighborhood were not full of good people. But most importantly, I was the cause of their frustration. They assumed that I didn’t have a good influence on

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Ghali because of the incident; I was considered a sinner in their terms of intellectuality. That's when my life went into a full turn of events.

Ghali's family decided that the best thing to do was to start a new life in Texas and leave New York, the place where Ghali and I grew up together, formed our friendship, and most importantly, became practicing Muslims. I was heartbroken. I didn't know what to do or what to say to make them change their minds. In the end I decided to give up and blame everything on myself. I was the cause of confusion and sadness.

I sat next to Ghali in the airport. One year had passed since that incident had happened. "I told you, it's not your fault," Ghali said firmly. "My parents just want me to have a good education and they didn't take that situation too well, that's all."

I shook my head and said even more firmly, "I'm the real reason your parents are moving. Don't even try to hide it. I am the crown of faith."

Ghali looked at me and said in a serious tone, "Allah is the one who chooses our faith, not us."

I looked in a different direction and shrugged, "I guess you're right."

Ghali's parents called his name loudly. "Ghali, it's time!"

Ghali got up from his seat and said, "Since I'm moving, who do I learn Islam from now? Who's going to help me struggle against Shaitan?"

I got up and said, "Allah, His help is all that you need." He looked at me and smiled and took out his hand.

We shook hands and he asked, "Will we ever see each other again?"

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I replied, “If Allah wills.” He turned around and I whispered, “May Allah guide you to the straight path. Ameen”

Two years passed, and I wasn't the same person that Ghali left in the airport that day. I became famous for the “incident”. People accepted me, they became my new friends, but they weren't really my “friends”. They only gave me respect and company because I was “strong” to them. I kept thinking, *If it wasn't for me, Ghali wouldn't have left...it was my fault.* I wanted more attention from people...it would make me feel better about myself. I found a sense of pride within myself; it made me stronger and stronger. I stopped praying and worshiping Allah in a few years; it no longer made sense to me. Pride was what made me feel better about myself and Islam was just too strict for me. Muslims throughout the world were causing chaos and destruction. Where was this peace that I fought for?

Another two years passed by as I entered high school. I started doing the new “cool thing”: getting drunk. I was invited to many different parties and although I doubted whether or not I should drink, I always gave in. My conscience told me that I had some fear of Him still left in my heart. I would often get into school fights with kids that were weaker than me because it made me look “cool”. My parents were worried about me. They told me that bullying was haram in Islam and that Islam was the religion of peace. I still kept a little faith in myself after what they told me; in small steps, I started repenting.

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One year passed by and I got into another fight with a kid. It was raining really hard; I was running to get home. Each rain drop that dropped on my shoulder felt like sharp arrows. Fear overtook me as I worried how my parents would react. I could imagine their disappointed faces, shocked and saddened to hear what I had done. I saw smoke from a distance as I ran. I was never a good runner but this time I ran as fast as a leopard. I stopped as I was a few steps away from my house and a sudden sense of fear ran through my nerves, like the chill of an icy wind. The smoke was from my house as I expected and the only thing that kept the house to be nothing but ashes. I felt the rain that dropped down my face like the tears of a child. That was the day that I changed, that was the day I lost my loyalty to Him, because that was the day my parents passed away.

I lost my faith, the crown of faith. If Islam was the true religion then why would my parents pass away? I started drinking, smoking, and taking drugs. It made me feel better about myself. I felt better as I was accepted by everyone. I made new friends. I joined a gang and we would assault the weaker “kids” at school. I was considered the leader of the crew: Taj-al-Din, the biggest “thug” at school, the “crown of faith”. I followed my friends and dropped out of school. I kept my loyalty with them - after all, they were loyal to me, and they treated me as a leader. My loyalty to Allah ceased to exist.

I opened my eyes and I felt Ghali tap my shoulder. I knew it was over; Allah would have no mercy on me. Through my eyes I saw my downfall as a Muslim, my life, my faith and my story as I turned from a Muslim to a non-believer.

Part II: Through the eyes of the believer

Will I find guidance? My faith: believer, or a non-believer? I asked my parents to take me to the closest Masjid in Texas. Friday was the one and only day I was allowed to go. The other days I

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promised to study all day long. I entered the Masjid and heard the azan. The Masjid was the biggest Masjid I had seen in my life. There was a big, green dome on the top. The inside ceiling of the Masjid was so high that it made me feel like I was standing outside. The top of the ceiling held a huge chandelier that was lit up. Jummah was beginning, everyone was lining up. I still had no idea how to pray. I was clueless and struggled, but I tried to do whatever Taj had taught me.

After Jummah salat, I stayed in the Masjid to read the Quran. I practiced out loud but I struggled a lot. I only knew a little Arabic, and that was from what Taj's mother had taught me. I stopped reading and closed the book; it was too much. I had no hope of being a Muslim without Taj.

"MashAllah" someone said behind me in a deep voice. I turned around and saw a tall, dark-skinned man with a long beard who was probably around the age of 25. He was wearing a white kufi on his head and he was giving me a wide smile. He walked over to me and took my hand.

"Aselamulaikum. My name is Luqman Masroor. Nice to meet you."

"Walaikum Asalam. My name is Ghali Diyari, and it's a pleasure to meet you as well," I replied. Long beard and a white kufi - *I think I found my luck*, I thought. "I want to learn the Quran. I've been struggling for quite a while now and I want to try my best to become a good Muslim. Since you're a scholar, could you help me please?" I asked eagerly.

"Most definitely, boy, but I'm not a scholar and don't think that a scholar will solve all your problems." He took a deep breath and continued. "This might sound weird, but I was stalking you for a reason, boy. It's because you seemed eager to learn. I could see that without even meeting you. But a scholar is not what you need boy, a scholar is not what you need at all." I stared back at him, confused. He was stalking me? "You need a good friend, that's what you need." I stared at him blankly and thought about it. He was right. Taj was the one who helped me, and he was the one who got me this far. "It's called Youth Group," answered Luqman. "Your friends make you who you

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are. Good friends can help you become a good Muslim, but bad friends can only make you closer to Shaitan. In Youth Group, we work on making good friends, establishing brotherhood, and we unite as the Youth to become better Muslims.”

I looked at him and understood what he meant; this was my chance to shine. “I’m in,” I said.

Youth Group changed my life completely. There were about 20 boys that would sit in a circle in the Masjid after Jummah each week, and Luqman would teach us Islamic lessons that actually related to our day to day lives. I learned a lot from Luqman, and it gave me courage to face the outside world and the all-out war with Shaitan. Although most of the members in Youth Group knew how to read the Quran and pray to Allah, Luqman would teach everyone as a reminder, and most importantly, so I would learn, too. I couldn’t thank Luqman enough for everything he did for me.

In about 2 years I became a whole different person. I was memorizing the Quran now and I prayed five times every day. Luqman always told me that praying 5 times a day would keep Shaitan away. After three years, I became a Hafiz of Islam, growing a small beard to illustrate my faith. Islam not only affected my faith in Allah; I was even the smartest kid in my grade now.

Things were wonderful until Luqman informed me he was leaving Youth Group. He told me that Youth Group needed to be run by the younger generation, and that it was his time to leave and for someone else to take his place. “I have to pick someone that is wise, kind, and optimistic. I have to choose someone that can brighten up everyone’s mood.” I thought about it for a second. Who would be the perfect person to lead the group? The group had to be in good hands and it had to keep running as is. Luqman looked at me and smiled. “I always did have fun stalking you, and you’re

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such an interesting believer mashAllah.” I looked at him, confused. Luqman took a deep breath and said each word clearly, “That person is you; you are the only one that I can leave Youth Group with and feel confident about it. I, Luqman Masroor, have chosen you, Ghali Diyari, as the new Ameer of Youth Group. Do you accept?”

I was shocked at what I just heard, *me* taking the place of Luqman? I didn’t think I was capable of taking *his* place. I thought about it. If I declined, then Luqman would have to find someone else, and he wouldn’t feel right about leaving it with someone else. I would ruin his whole plan and maybe even ruin Youth Group. Just then I smiled back at him and replied, “I accept.”

I was going back to New York. It had been 7 years since I left my home town and now I was returning. I remembered my old friend, Taj. We were both 11 at the time I moved and now we were both 18. I tried to picture Taj; I could picture him with a long beard as well as being really kind and religious as he was 7 years ago. I was excited to once again see my old friend who brought me closer to Islam. Without him, I wouldn’t have gotten so far.

The plane ride was about 3 and a half hours, and I was traveling alone; my parents had work for the whole week and it was impossible for them to go. I was done with school and it was the summer time. I missed my old friend deeply and I was really excited to see him again. I could finally thank him for his guidance. I thought about all this as I was driving to the Masjid of Selden, the Masjid I grew up in. It was Jummah time, and I knew that Taj would surely be there. I heard someone say the azan in an extremely beautiful voice. And that’s where I saw him. Outside the window, I saw my old friend, Taj. He looked completely different. He was taller and more muscular, and the only way I recognized him was by his face. But something wasn’t right. In his hand was a big tank of gasoline and in his other hand was a small sized lighter. I rushed out of the Masjid. Everyone scolded and

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yelled things, but I was in too much of a rush to reply. I came out and saw Taj's hand throwing the gasoline on the Masjid. I ran and stopped when I was a few steps away from him. Taj, realizing that someone was behind him, turned around and opened his mouth slightly, but then stopped. He looked astonished, as if he just saw the angel of death right in front of him. He paused for a second and then said, "Ghali? Is that you, Ghali?"

I nodded my head sharply and said, "What's happened to you Taj? Were you burning the Masjid down?" He looked at me steadily and he observed my black beard. He gave me a smile, a dangerous smile. He cleared his throat and said, "My loyalty no longer lasts with God. My friends were loyal to me. They helped me when I was down, not Him. You believe in God, Ghali? Well you will be disappointed."

I stared at him, confused. What happened to my dear old friend? "What happened to your parents, Taj?" I asked.

"They died...in a fire," Taj replied in a grim voice.

I looked down and said, "Inna lillahi wa inna illaihi raji'un." I looked back up and made eye contact with Taj. "They're in a better place, inshAllah. Keep your faith with Allah. There's a reason for everything in life. There was a reason why your parents died. And from what I know, they were good people, good Muslims. That's why you need to keep your loyalty with Allah. He's the one that can help you because He's Allah, the Most Merciful and Gracious."

Taj laughed at my words loudly. "It's too late, it's just too late. You're so naïve, Ghali," said Taj. Taj picked up the gasoline box and just as he was about to throw the gasoline on the Masjid wall, I punched the container down. It dripped and fell all over Taj. Taj screamed and dropped his lighter on the floor. Everyone rushed out of the Masjid to see what was going on. The lighter fell right by

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my feet and I picked it up as quickly as I could. Just then Taj started running. I chased him, bringing the lighter with me.

I almost caught up to Taj; he ran faster than he ever did. We ran in the corn fields, the same field that we ran 7 years ago. I could tell Taj was tired and exhausted. He was gasping for air. Just then he stopped running. I almost caught up to him now; he was just in my reach. I stopped when I was 3 steps away from him. The wind blew hard and moved the corn on the fields slowly. I held the lighter firmly in my hand and I tapped Taj's shoulder lightly. Taj turned around slowly and looked horrified; he closed his eyes and waited for me to throw the fire on him. I told him to open his eyes, and so he did. I moved the lighter to the level of his face and switched it on. Tears were falling down from his eyes slowly, like water drops falling down from a wet leaf. I gave him a wide smile and said slowly, "Islam is the religion of peace, you got it wrong." He looked at me in confusion.

I switched the lighter off and I threw it on the floor. All of a sudden, it started raining briskly. The rain fell down on our faces and I felt a shiver down my spine. I cleared my throat and said, "When you lose all hope, sanity and people you love, no one can help you, No one but Him, our creator and the one that chooses our faith because He *is* the king of everything, the crown of faith. If we're loyal to Him, then no matter what happens, one day your faith will turn out good." He looked at Taj who was...smiling, but this time it was a smile that reminded me of the sun shining. He looked calm and happy. He opened his mouth slowly and said, "La ilaha illalla, muhammadur-rasulalla."

"Verily, with every difficulty there is relief." The Qur'an (94:5-6)

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Note: The story is modified to fit 10 pages as its being used for a competition, MIST. The story may be fast paced at times because of the 10 page limit.

Meaning of Names

Ghali Diyari (Gha-lee Dee-yaree): Beloved Gift

Taj-Al-Din (Taj-Al-Deen): Crown of Faith

Luqman Masroor (Luke-mahn Mas-Rur): Wise happy

Morals/Themes

“You’re likely to follow the faith of your friends”

“Never lose hope in Allah, the most merciful”

“With every difficulty, there is relief”

Alternate Ending

Note: In place of the last paragraph I had originally had this:

All of a sudden, the wind blew again and the fire from the lighter went onto Taj. I screamed and closed the lighter as quickly as I could. But it was too late. My best friend, my childhood friend, was on fire. It was over for him. “No, this can’t happen, it just can’t,” I yelled out. I looked at my friend on fire and to my surprise; he wasn’t screaming or looking like he was in pain. He was...smiling, but this time it was a smile that reminded me of the sun shining. He looked calm and happy. He opened his mouth slowly and said, “La ilaha illalla, muhammadur-rasulalla.”

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About the Author (Saad Riazuddin)

I was born in Long Island, New York, March 25 1994. Much of the story's morals and themes have to do with how he was raised throughout my childhood. At age 12 I was admitted into a Monday-Thursday mardarsa (Quran class) by my parents which ultimately changed my life significantly. Many of the stories morals and themes developed in thought from these changes I had experienced. Throughout the mardarsa I found friends that had a huge impact throughout my life. My social life as well as my ideology as a Muslim was impacted by the faithful friends I had made. A few years later, Br. Ahmer Imam had introduced me to the Muslim Boys Youth Group which had an even more impact in my life. Throughout High School I actively participated in the group and made friends who guided me throughout my life. In summer 2011, I had a significant turning point in life when I moved from the town I grow up in, too Frisco, Texas. Due to my view of the importance of youth activities, with the help of the Frisco community I was able to begin a similar youth group in the Islamic Center of Frisco alhumdollilah.

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Interview of the Author (Saad Riazuddin)

(a) How did you aim to convey this year's theme (Loyalty) in your work? In what ways does your writing represent your individual point of view, imagination, creativity, and individuality?

Many forget to realize that this whole life is a test. Whatever goes on during this lifetime either good or bad, Allah (swt) tests us on how we react and how many of us stay **loyal** to Him even if our life turns upside down. In my point of view, friends have a big impact on your faith which all in all affects your loyalty with Allah (Swt). If you have good friends, you're more likely to be loyal to Him, while if you have bad friends, you're more likely to cease your loyalty with Him. This is clearly established in novel as Taj (being a practicing Muslim) turns out bad due to his loyalty with his friends, while Ghali turns out to be good after influenced by Taj and his latter friends.

The Holy Prophet [s] said: "Man is influenced by the faith of his friends. Therefore, be careful of whom you associate with."

(b) Explain your purpose and inspiration in developing these writings and describe how you achieved that goal. Describe any influences.

First and far most, I was influenced by going to Muslim Boys Youth Group at my local Masjid, Selden. It completely made me see the reality that making good friends helps you in becoming a better Muslim. Just by even "chilling" with druggies, alcoholics, etc. and portraying yourself as a good person with good person, you can change a person. This was achieved in the story as Ghali and Taj changes based on their friends.

(c) What writing details and characteristics did you use, and how did you select and organize these in your work?

I tried to make at first, Taj and Ghali both good and eager to become good Muslims. I latter made Taj lose all hope slowly and Ghali become more and more hopeful until both were at completely different ends.

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Imagination/Artwork

Theme Song (Nasheed): After my friend, Mohsin Hassan, introduced me to the nasheed: “First we need the love by Zain Bhikha” I was motivated to write the ending as it was and always tried to imagine the ending followed by that nasheed.

Note: Bellow are images that relate to how I pictured the places in “The Crown of Faith” to be as.

Cornfield (Beginning and ending of story)



“We were playing tag and I was “it”; we were running through the corn fields on my farm. The corn fields were huge, almost 6 feet tall. It was hard for us to run through the fields, but somehow we ran fast, with hardly any strength at all.” (Page 1-The Crown of Faith)

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Playing tag was definitely not easy for Ghali and Taj to play through this huge corn field, but they still ran as fast they could.

The Burning House



“The smoke was from my house as I expected and the only thing that kept the house to be nothing but ashes.” (Page 7-The Crown of Faith)

Although this picture depicts a little more than ashes, it was at this point not that long before Taj arrived to see the devastation.

Selden Masjid (Ghali and Taj’s childhood Masjid)

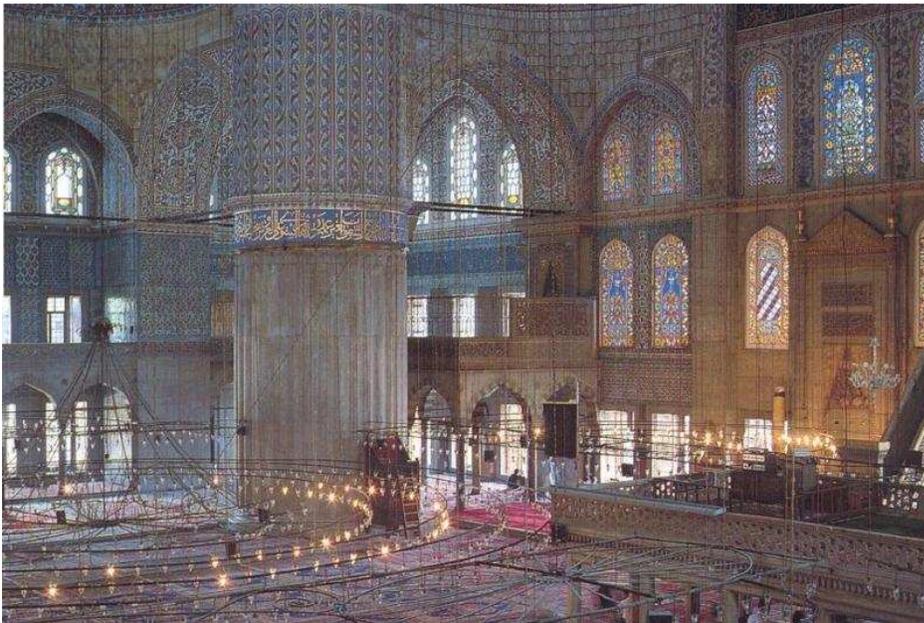


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“I thought about all this as I was driving to the Masjid of Selden, the Masjid I grew up in” (Page 5-The Crown of Faith)

This was my childhood Masjid as well. Not the biggest Masjid you’ve probably seen however, the Masjid community was very active alhumdollilah. A new and bigger Masjid is being built right next to hit insh’Allah, however the this structure will be torn down once the new one is built.

Ghali’s Masjid in Dallas



“The inside ceiling of the Masjid was so high that it made me feel like I was standing outside.

The top of the ceiling held a huge chandelier that was lit up.” (Page 8-The Crown of Faith)

Yes, it really is HUGE subhannAllah! This Masjid in reality is however located in Istanbul Turkey, also known as the Blue Mosque.

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Faith of the Characters

What happens to the characters?

Ghali Diyari: He returns to Dallas to his Youth Group as the head Ameer. He continues to serve the youth until he retires in a few years after which his best friend, Taj-Al-Din takes over. After retiring as Ameer, Ghali further expands his knowledge as he studies to become a hafiz by memorizing the Quran. As a grown man, Ghali not only becomes the professor of Islamic studies in college but he becomes the head Imam of the Masjid he was formally the Youth ameer of.

Taj-Al-Din: After accepting Islam once again, Taj leaves his sinful past behind and moves to Dallas, Texas, with his best friend Ghali Diyari. After learning to increase his knowledge of iman through Ghali, he is given the position of Ameer of the Youth Group in Dallas. In a few years he retires and further expands his knowledge by becoming an Alim of Islam. After completing his studies, Taj moves back to New York in which he works towards helping the youth through their struggles. In a few years, Taj becomes one of the most influential Muslim speakers in America, using his past mistakes as a tool to help him reach out to millions of Muslim youth in America.

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Hadith/Ayyuts Related to Story

"A servant could do the actions of the folk of the fire but be of the folk of the garden or could do the actions of the folk of the garden but be of the folk of the fire; for actions are by their last ones." Bukhari 6238

[A person who appears pious in this world (Taj as a young boy) may die as a non-believer, and a person who appears as a non-believer (Ghali as a young boy), can die as a believer. Looks and appearances are very deceiving. However (although the ending might not be clear) they might die as believers.

“Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.” The Qur’an (94:5-6)

[No matter how what struggles Taj went through in his life, at the end he finally found relief by his old friend, Ghali.]

“A person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look whom you befriend,” Abu Dawood and Tirmidhi

[Ghali found the right type of friends and so his turnout was good while Taj befriended the wrong type of friends which made his turnout bad. However at the end, Ghali and Taj both had good turnouts since they were both friends of each other.]

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Short Summary

Ghali Diyari and Taj-al-Din are best friends. After an incident, Ghali moves away from his best friend. Taj who feels responsible for the incident loses his faith and loyalty with Allah and turns away from Islam while Ghali works on becoming closer to Allah. After 7 years they finally meet each other once again, however this time their friendship is different.

Jazakullah khair for reading!

Check out my site: <http://themuslimvoice.com> and <http://mylifeishalal.wordpress.com>