

Islamic Spiritual Journey Books
Series

**Finding Allah Finding Yourself:
A Muslim Spiritual Novel**

**An Islamic Story Book About
Faith, Small Things, and the
Guide to Allah**

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CHAPTER 1: Morning

Hasan woke to the sound of his own coughing.

The alarm had been sounding for almost twenty minutes. He knew this because he had been lying there watching the numbers change on his phone screen, unable to find the will to move. 6:41 became 6:42 became 6:43, each minute another small theft he would never get back.

His mouth tasted like an ashtray left out overnight in old whiskey. His head kept its own slow, patient rhythm of pain, the kind that would follow him through the whole day like a debt collector. The sheets beneath him were damp, and he could not have said with any confidence whether he had showered the day before, or the day before that.

He was thirty-six years old.

The apartment around him looked like evidence left behind after something had gone wrong. Clothes on the floor. Dishes stacked in the sink. Bottles lined along the counter, more of them than he would have liked to count. On the shelf by the door sat the prayer rug his mother had given him years before, still folded exactly the way he had folded it the last time he used it, a fine layer of dust softening its color. He had not touched it in months. He could not have told you the exact day he stopped, because there had been no single day. There had only been a slow going quiet, the kind that never announces itself until someone finally asks where a thing went.

Fajr had opened and closed somewhere underneath his sleep that morning, the same as it had every morning for longer than he cared to add up. He had not stirred for it. He rarely did anymore.

He reached for the pack of cigarettes on the nightstand. Found one, lit it, pulled the smoke into his lungs before his feet had even touched the floor. It filled him with something that almost passed for comfort. This was breakfast. This was how his days began now.

His phone buzzed. He glanced at the screen.

Ammi calling.

He watched it ring. Watched her name pulse there, each vibration its own small accusation. She would ask how he was doing. She would hear the lie sitting under his voice when he said he was fine. She would worry in that particular way mothers worry, helpless and persistent, and he would feel guilty for the worry and resentful of the guilt in the very same breath.

He let it go to voicemail.

The phone buzzed again a minute later. A text this time, from his sister.

Hasan. Haven't heard your voice in weeks. Coffee this weekend? I miss you.

He read it twice and set the phone face down on the nightstand. He would answer later. Or he would not. Either way the message would sit there, gathering weight, growing harder to lift with every hour that passed.

The shower ran lukewarm. He had let the gas bill slide again, and he stood under the thin spray without really washing, just enduring it until the cold pushed him out.

His shirt was wrinkled. He put it on anyway. There was a mark on the collar he had noticed three days earlier and done nothing about. He did not look at his own eyes in the mirror while he dressed. That, at least, had become a kind of skill.

The train was crowded with people who all seemed to know exactly where they were going. Hasan wedged himself into a corner and let the motion carry him, watching nothing in particular. A woman near the door was reading something on her phone, smiling privately at whatever was on the screen. He watched her for a moment longer than he meant to. He could not remember the last time something small had made him smile like that, without an audience, without a reason he could name.

He arrived at the office twenty minutes late. No one looked up. No one said anything. He slid into his chair the way a person slides into a room they no longer feel they belong in, and opened his inbox to messages he had no real intention of answering that day either.

The office moved around him the way it always did, keyboards and phone calls and the low, steady churn of people who still believed their work mattered. Hasan sat in the middle of it and did the smallest version of his job that he could get away with, which by now had become a kind of expertise in itself.

At eleven he went down to the street to smoke. The sidewalk was thick with the mid-morning rush, everyone moving with somewhere to be. A father passed by holding his daughter's hand, the two of them laughing at some private joke only they understood. Hasan watched them go and felt something twist in his chest that he did not have a name for and did not try very hard to find one.

Richard found him at his desk a little after three.

The Whitfield file. Where are we?

Working on it.

You said that yesterday.

Still true.

Richard's jaw tightened in the way it always did lately, somewhere between patience and the running out of it. He was maybe ten years older than Hasan, the kind of man who had climbed by simply being reliable, year after year, and he had given Hasan more chances than either of them could easily count anymore.

End of week. No more extensions.

Understood.

Richard walked away, and Hasan looked at the file, three paragraphs long where it needed to be thirty pages, the deadline sitting two days out. He opened a browser tab instead and read about nothing in particular until the light outside had gone from white to gold.

He ate lunch alone at his desk, the way he ate most lunches now. In the afternoon his phone lit up twice more. His mother again. Then his sister, a second time.

Seriously. Coffee. I worry about you, Hasan.

He cleared the notification without answering it, the same way he had cleared the last one, and the one before that.

By six he was at the bar on the corner, the one where the bartender knew his order and knew better than to ask questions. He took his usual stool. He ordered his usual drink. The first one went down easy. The second went down easier.

Around him the happy hour crowd filled in, groups of friends leaning into each other, laughing about their days, their jobs, their lives that had not quietly stalled the way his had. A couple in the corner was celebrating something, an anniversary maybe, heads bent close together in the particular language of people with history between them. Hasan ordered a third.

An older man settled onto the stool beside him a little after nine, weathered in the particular way of a person who had spent decades making choices not unlike Hasan's own.

Drinking alone again?

Is there another way?

The man laughed, low and rough, and raised his glass without much conviction behind it.

Thirty years I've been sitting on stools like this one, he said, watching my life go by out that window.

Learn anything?

Not a damn thing.

They drank without talking much after that, two men who had silently agreed to let the evening dissolve into something neither would remember clearly by morning.

Hasan walked home once the bar closed, the city loud and indifferent around him. His apartment was dark and quiet when he let himself in, the same darkness that greeted him most nights now. He poured one more drink, lit one more cigarette, and stood at the window watching the lights blur together below.

His phone showed four missed calls by then. His mother, twice. His sister, twice. A text from his father, which was rare enough on its own to mean something.

Your mother is worried. Please call when you can.

He read it once and set the phone down without answering.

He thought, briefly, about saying something. Not to anyone in the missed calls. To the one he used to speak to every night without needing a reason, back when he was a boy praying beside his father in a small room that smelled like carpet and old books. He opened his mouth in the quiet of the apartment, and nothing came. He had not spoken to Allah directly in so long that he no longer knew how to begin, the way a person forgets the opening notes of a song they once knew by heart.

He finished the cigarette instead. Then the drink. Then he lay down without undressing, and sleep came the way it always came now, heavy and without comfort, the only mercy a night like this one had left to give him.

• • •

Hasan woke before his alarm, the way he always did.

The room was gray with early light. He lay still for a moment, feeling the quiet rightness of it, and then he rose without hesitation, because Fajr had already begun and he had promised himself long ago that he would never again let it start without him.

He made wudu in the dark, the water cold against his hands and face, and then he prayed, unhurried, the words settling into him the way they had settled into him since he was a boy kneeling beside his father in a small room that smelled like carpet and old books. Sumayya prayed beside him that morning, the way she did most mornings, her own quiet prayer finishing a breath after his.

When he finished, he stayed on the floor a moment longer.

Thank you for this day, he said quietly, to no one visible, to the presence he had been speaking to since childhood and now spoke to again, every morning, without fail. Guide me. Help me be of use to someone today.

It was not a formal supplication with any fixed shape to it. Just a conversation, plain and unscripted, the way he would talk to someone who already knew everything about him and loved him regardless.

He went to the kitchen and made coffee the slow way, in the small copper pot his mother had sent him years before. Sumayya joined him at the small table while the water still warmed, and they sat together as the light came up outside the window, talking about nothing in particular. Her meeting later that morning. The neighbor's cat that kept getting into the hallway. Something one of the children had said the night before that had made them both laugh so hard they had to retell it to each other twice.

A jogger passed on the street below. A dog walker wrestled three leashes into one stubborn knot. The ordinary miracle of a city deciding, once again, to begin, and the two of them sitting inside it, unhurried, grateful for something as small as coffee and a shared laugh before the day asked anything more of them.

He never tired of this hour. There was something hopeful in it, something about the daily renewal of a world that had every reason to give up and never quite did.

This was not the same man who had closed his eyes the night before with a cigarette between his fingers and nothing left to say to anyone. Or perhaps it was exactly the same man. That question is the reason this book exists at all.

CHAPTER 2: Work

Hasan woke to a headache that had already been working on him for hours before the alarm.

He lay in the wreckage of the bedsheets, cataloging the ways his body intended to punish him today. The dry mouth. The pulse behind his eyes. The low nausea that came from a dinner of whiskey and nothing else. The ceiling above him had not changed. It never changed. He had been staring at the same water stain for months, watching it slowly bloom into the shape of something he could not name.

He was late again. He did not hurry.

The Whitfield file sat open on his monitor like an accusation, the cursor blinking in the same blank paragraph it had blinked in the day before. Around him the office hummed with people who still cared about outcomes, keyboards, phone calls, the low continuous churn of purpose. Hasan sat in the middle of it, doing nothing, mattering to none of it.

He opened a new tab and read about things that did not concern him until ten o'clock, when he went down to smoke.

The sidewalk was thick with the mid-morning rush, people hurrying past with coffee cups and phones and the distracted look of those with somewhere to be. Hasan stood in the alley beside the building and lit a cigarette, watching them the way you watch a river you are no longer part of.

A woman went by laughing into her phone, hair catching the light, her happiness so effortless it looked like a trick. Something ugly turned in his chest, envy maybe, or the particular resentment of a man who has stopped believing the world owes him

anything and cannot forgive it for cooperating with someone else instead.

Must be nice, he muttered, and went back inside.

He forced himself to write three sentences of the Whitfield file. They were bad sentences, but they were something. He rewarded himself with a walk to the bodega, where he stood in front of the beer cooler a long moment before leaving with only a sandwich. A small victory. He noted it without celebrating it.

At lunch, alone in the break room, his sister texted again.

Coffee Saturday still on? Miss your face.

He typed back. Maybe. Work's crazy. I'll let you know.

He would not let her know. He would let the day arrive and invent an excuse, the way he always did, and she would say she understood, and neither of them would believe it. That was the shape the pattern had taken. He no longer knew how to break it.

At three, Richard was back at his desk.

Whitfield.

Working on it.

You said that this morning.

Still true.

Hasan. I need to know if you're going to deliver. The client is asking me questions I don't have good answers for.

Something flared in Hasan's chest, not guilt exactly. The particular anger of being seen, of being asked to account for himself when he had nothing to account with.

I'll have it done.

By Friday.

By Friday.

Richard left, and Hasan sat with the blinking cursor and the useless anger, and instead of turning either into work, he went outside and smoked three cigarettes in a row and let the afternoon dissolve.

By half past five he had added two more sentences. Five total for the day. A new record in the wrong direction.

He went to the bar.

It was fuller than usual, the after-work crowd mixing with the ones who had clearly been there since noon. Hasan found a space at the rail and ordered a double, neat.

You look like you need that, the bartender said.

I need about ten of them.

We can arrange that.

He drank. The whiskey burned and then spread warm through his chest, and this was how you survived a day like today. You drank until the failures went distant, until nothing sharp was left to hurt.

By his fourth, the man from the night before was back on the next stool, same weathered face, same air of decades spent exactly here.

You again, the man said.

Me again.

Still drinking alone?

Still no other way I know of.

The man raised his glass. To consistency.

They drank without talking after that. Hasan watched a game on the television above the bar that he did not care about, letting the noise stand in for meaning.

At closing time he walked home, poured one more, lit one more, and stood at the window watching the lights blur. His phone showed missed calls from his parents, from his sister, people who had not given up on him yet, though he could no longer imagine why.

He opened his notes app.

Whitfield still not done. Richard on me about it. Don't care.

Bar guy again. Same stool. Same empty look. We didn't say much. Nothing to say.

Yasmin wants coffee. Can't face her concern, her questions, the way she looks at me like she's still waiting for the brother I used to be to come back.

I don't know where he went.

He saved the note and dropped onto the couch. Sleep came hard and left early. By three in the morning he was staring at the ceiling again, wondering how many more days could look exactly like this one.

• • •

Hasan arrived at the office early, the way he did now.

The building was quiet at that hour, fluorescent lights humming over rows of empty desks, morning sun just starting to reach through the windows. He liked this hour, before the noise, before the demands, when he could settle into his work uninterrupted.

The Whitfield draft sat on his desk red-lined by the partners, thoughtful notes in the margins. He had spent the weekend refining it, and their feedback was specific, generous. They trusted him. He wanted to be worth the trust.

By nine he had addressed most of it. By ten he was walking the team through the changes, taking questions, adjusting on the spot. Bilal caught his eye across the table and gave a small nod.

Good work, the senior partner said afterward. The client will be pleased.

Let me know if they have questions.

Will do. Nice job, Hasan.

The compliment settled into him like warmth, not because he needed the validation, but because he had done something worth complimenting. He had put in the effort. There was a quiet pride in that, one that had nothing to do with ego and everything to do with simply showing up.

At lunch he sat with Bilal in the little park across from the office, autumn sun on their faces.

You look happy, Bilal said.

Do I?

Disgustingly. What's the secret?

No secret. Good morning. The Whitfield thing came together.

Sumayya's rubbing off on you.

Probably. She's aggressively grateful. It's contagious.

They ate and talked about Bilal's latest attempt at getting his sister's cat to like him, and the trip he was planning with Sara in the spring.

You two should come, Bilal said. Make it a thing.

I'll mention it. She's been wanting to travel more.

After lunch he called his sister.

Hasan! This is a surprise.

Good surprise?

The best kind. What's up?

Checking in. We're still on for Saturday? Coffee at your place?

Absolutely. I've been looking forward to it all week.

Me too. He meant it. He genuinely wanted to see her, to hear her life, to be the brother she deserved. Everything all right with you?

Mostly. I'll tell you Saturday. It's a face to face kind of thing.

That sounds ominous.

It's not. Just life. You know.

I do. Whatever it is, I'm here.

I know you are. That's why I wanted to say it to your face.

After the call, Hasan sat at his desk with something he had taken years to learn how to recognize. Gratitude. For a sister who had never stopped believing in him. For the chance to show up for her now.

The afternoon passed in steady, unremarkable effort, the kind that quietly built into results. By five he felt satisfied in a way that had nothing to do with achievement and everything to do with having tried.

He walked home through the golden evening and stopped at the florist for daffodils. Sumayya had mentioned wanting yellow in the apartment.

She was in the kitchen when he arrived, something fragrant with garlic and rosemary on the stove.

Flowers again?

I have a problem. A flower-buying problem.

There are worse ones.

He set the daffodils in the window vase. She watched him with an expression he could never quite name, love, amusement, something underneath both.

What?

Nothing. Just looking at you.

And?

And I like what I see.

They ate at the small table, the daffodils bright against the evening light. She told him about a difficult artist at the gallery. He told her about Whitfield, about Bilal and the spring trip, about the call with his sister.

I'm glad you're seeing her Saturday, Sumayya said. She needs you.

She said it's face to face. I'm trying not to worry.

Whatever it is, you'll handle it. That's what you do.

Later, dishes done, apartment quiet, Hasan sat by the window with his phone.

Good day. Whitfield well received. Lunch with Bilal. Talk of the spring trip.

Called Yasmin. She sounds fine but wants to talk. Saturday can't come fast enough.

Bought daffodils. Apartment feels more alive with them in it.

Alhamdulillah for work that matters. For friends who care. For the chance to show up for the people I love.

He saved the note and set the phone aside.

Sumayya was reading again, feet tucked under her. He watched her, feeling the quiet miracle of it all.

What? she asked without looking up.

Nothing. Just how lucky I am.

Keep thinking it.

He laughed, picked up his own book, and the night closed gently around them.

CHAPTER 3: Weekend

Saturday arrived gray and cold, the kind of morning that made staying in bed feel like the only reasonable decision.

Hasan stayed in bed.

He surfaced near eleven, not rested, just unable to sleep any further. His sister had texted twice already. He had not answered. The coffee they had planned was an hour away, and he was going to cancel, a headache, a work emergency, something, and she would say she understood, and they would both know she did not.

He typed. Not feeling great. Rain check?

Her reply came fast. Of course. Feel better. Let me know when.

He could hear the disappointment folded into the words, the resignation. She had learned to expect this from him. He had taught her to.

He dropped the phone and went to the kitchen, where he opened a beer from the fridge. Just one. Just to take the edge off the morning. It was cold and bitter and exactly what he wanted, something to not feel with.

By noon he had finished three and moved out to the fire escape to smoke, watching the street below. Dog walkers, strollers, hand-holding couples. Everyone going somewhere. His life sitting still while all of it moved past him.

He thought about calling his mother. It had been three weeks, maybe four. She had stopped leaving voicemails. She just called now and let it ring out, let him ignore it, and he suspected the voicemails had become too painful for her, all that hope in

her voice, all that worry, easier for them both if she simply stopped asking.

The afternoon went by empty. He could have cleaned the apartment. He could have walked somewhere. Instead he opened another beer and let the television talk to itself while he did not watch it.

By six he was restless enough to go out.

The bar was crowded with a Saturday crowd, louder and younger than the weekday regulars. Hasan found a spot at the end of the rail and ordered whiskey, watching the groups of friends around him who all seemed to know each other, who all seemed to belong somewhere.

He drank for hours, alone, feeling increasingly like something the room could see through. A couple nearby was marking an anniversary, hands laced across the table, looking at each other the way people look when the feeling has not worn off yet. Hasan ordered another and tried not to think about anything at all.

By closing time he was drunk but not drunk enough to stop thinking, and he walked home through streets still loud with Saturday night, people spilling out of doorways, laughing in ways he no longer remembered how to do.

His apartment was dark and cold. He poured a drink from the counter bottle and stood at the window, the city blurring through glass he had not cleaned in months.

Three missed calls from his mother. Two from his sister. A text from his father, which was unusual.

Your mother is worried. Please call when you can.

He did not.

Instead he opened the notes app.

Canceled on Yasmin again. She said she understood. She didn't.

Ammi and Abba both called. Didn't pick up. What would I even say. How do I explain that I'm drowning and don't know how to ask anyone to pull me out.

Tomorrow is Sunday. Then Monday. Then the rest of it, stretching out, the same day on repeat until it isn't anymore.

What is the point of any of this.

He saved the note, finished the whiskey, and let sleep take him, thick and dreamless, the only escape he had left.

• • •

Saturday morning arrived bright and sharp, the kind of clean autumn day that made a person grateful for the season.

Hasan was already up before the sun, Fajr behind him, the apartment quiet except for the small sounds of Sumayya moving in the kitchen. He slipped in beside her and started the coffee.

You're up early for a Saturday, she said.

Coffee with Yasmin at ten. Want to run first.

Look at you, being healthy.

Don't get used to it.

He ran through the park, cold air sharp in his lungs, his body finding its rhythm as other runners passed with the brief nod of people doing hard things by choice. Dogs chased balls across wet grass. Children shrieked on the playground. The world was awake in every direction.

After showering, he walked to meet his sister, who was already at their table when he arrived. He pulled her into a hug.

You look good, he said.

You're lying, but I'll take it. She smiled, but something sat underneath it, something held back.

They ordered and sat by the window, the shop humming with weekend energy around them.

So, Hasan said. Face to face conversation. What's going on?

Yasmin wrapped both hands around her cup. I didn't want to say it over the phone. Felt like something that needed a face.

You're scaring me a little.

It's not scary. At least I don't think so. She breathed in. I'm pregnant.

Hasan felt his whole face break open. Yasmin. That's incredible.

You really think so?

Of course. You're going to be an amazing mother.

The timing feels strange, though. Yusuf and I have only been married two years. I'm not sure I feel ready. Nobody warns you that the readiness might never come.

No one's ever ready. Ammi says that. You do it and you figure it out as you go.

Ammi says a lot of things.

Some of them are even true. He took her hand across the table. You're going to be great. And I'm going to be an uncle. Do you understand how exciting that is? I'll be the uncle who spoils the kid rotten and hands them back the second they get cranky.

She laughed, eyes bright. You promise you're happy for me?

I'm thrilled. So thrilled I might actually cry, and you know I don't cry.

You cried at my wedding.

Allergies.

In October?

Seasonal. Very common.

She laughed again, the tension she had been carrying releasing all at once. They talked another hour about the pregnancy, her fears, her hopes, about Yusuf, who was thrilled and terrified in equal measure, about their parents, who would be overjoyed.

Have you told Ammi and Abba yet?

You're the first. I wanted you to hear it before anyone.

Something swelled in Hasan's chest, gratitude, or maybe just love, plain and whole. His sister had wanted him to be first. He had earned that, somewhere along the way, through years of simply showing up.

I'm honored, he said. And I'm here. Whatever you need.

I know. That's why you were first.

They walked the neighborhood afterward, arm in arm, talking about everything and nothing, the light gold on the brownstones. Hasan felt the simple joy of being with someone he loved, doing nothing in particular, just present.

They parted with a long hug.

Tell Sumayya I said hi, Yasmin said.

Tell Yusuf I said congratulations, and that if he ever hurts you I'll have words with him.

You say that every time.

Because it's true every time.

He walked home through the park, heart full. A baby. His sister was having a baby. A whole new person coming into the world, and he got to be there for it, got to witness it, got to keep showing up as the people he loved moved through their own becoming.

Sumayya was reading when he got home, curled in the afternoon light.

How's Yasmin?

Pregnant.

Sumayya sat up. What?

I'm going to be an uncle.

Hasan! That's wonderful.

I know. I might have cried a little.

Allergies?

Seasonal.

She laughed, and they sat together and talked about Yasmin, about babies, about the future they had not mapped but had begun, quietly, to imagine.

Do you ever think about it? Sumayya asked. Having children?

Sometimes. With you it doesn't feel frightening. It feels like something we'd do well.

We'd probably make plenty of mistakes.

Everyone does. The whole point is to keep showing up even when you don't know what you're doing yet.

They sat together as afternoon slid into evening, the apartment warm around them.

Later, after dinner, after the dishes, Hasan opened his phone.

Yasmin is pregnant. Cried. Allergies.

She told me before Ammi and Abba. Before anyone. I didn't know how much that would mean until she said it out loud.

Walked home through the park. Everything looked gold.

Sumayya and I talked about kids. Didn't decide anything. Just talked. Felt like the start of a conversation we'll keep having.

Alhamdulillah for this family. For this life. For the chance to show up.

He saved the note and set the phone down.

Sunday stretched ahead, quiet and full of possibility. Breakfast together. A walk by the water, maybe. Small things. The kind that added up to a life worth living.

Hasan settled deeper into his chair, feeling the peace of it.

This was what he had built. Not perfection. Not certainty. Just this. A good life, full of connection and gratitude and love.

It was enough. It was more than enough.

CHAPTER 4: Collision

The coffee shop on 73rd Street was packed on Wednesday morning, the line curling back toward the door, everyone desperate for caffeine before facing the day.

Hasan stood in it, head pounding, mouth dry, clothes wrinkled from having been slept in. He had rolled out of bed at nine fifteen, late again, and decided coffee mattered more than punctuality. Richard would say something. Richard always said something. Let him.

The line crawled. Hasan stared at his phone, scrolling nothing, avoiding the eyes of the productive people around him.

That was when he saw her.

She sat at a table by the window, alone, a book open in front of her. Late twenties maybe, dark hair pulled back, a face so open and unguarded it was almost hard to look at directly.

She laughed at something on the page, not a polite laugh, a real one, her whole face changing with it, brighter somehow. People near her glanced over and smiled without meaning to, caught in the pull of it.

Something twisted in Hasan's chest.

She looked happy. Actually happy. Not performing it, just being it, coffee and book and no one to impress, radiating something he did not have a name for and could not remember ever feeling.

He resented her for it.

The intensity surprised him. A stranger he would never meet, sitting there being happy like it cost nothing, while he stood in

line with a hangover and a job he hated and an apartment that smelled like smoke and failure.

She looked up, scanning the room, and for a second their eyes met.

She smiled, the polite smile strangers give each other, nothing more.

He looked away.

At the counter he paid for his coffee and had to walk past her table to leave. He kept his eyes forward and pushed through the door without looking back.

On the train he opened his notes app.

Saw a woman at the coffee shop. Dark hair. Reading. Laughing like she's never had a bad day in her life.

Probably never worked a real day. Probably has everything handed to her. Sitting there like the world is a good place.

Hated her. Hated how easy it looked. Hated that I can't remember the last time I laughed at anything.

What is wrong with me.

He saved the note and pocketed the phone.

The day passed the way it always did, work he did not do, meetings he barely attended, lunch alone scrolling through nothing that mattered. By evening he was home, the coffee shop woman still lodged somewhere in his mind, her smile, the way she had looked at him like he was unremarkable, forgettable.

He was forgettable.

He opened the whiskey and drank until the thought stopped bothering him.

• • •

Hasan came home to find Sumayya already in the kitchen, something fragrant simmering on the stove.

You're home early, he said.

Left at four. Needed air. Spent the afternoon at that coffee shop on 73rd with my book.

The good one?

The one Sara recommended. It's actually funny, I was laughing out loud, which probably made me look unwell to everyone around me.

They moved around each other in the easy choreography of a shared life. He set the table. She finished the sauce. They sat as the evening light softened through the window.

How was your day? she asked.

Good. The Whitfield meeting went well.

That's great. You've been working hard on that. She paused, pushing food around her plate. Actually, something a little sad happened today. There was a man in line at the coffee shop. Maybe our age, a little older. Wrinkled clothes. Looked like he hadn't slept in days.

Hasan took a bite of pasta, only half listening.

He looked so lost, Sumayya went on. I don't have a better word for it. Like he'd given up on something, or maybe everything. Our eyes met for a second and I smiled, just being friendly, and he looked away like it burned him.

Maybe he was having a bad day.

Maybe. But it felt like more than that. Like he was drowning and didn't think anyone could see. Or didn't want them to. She looked up. I made dua for him after he left. I know that sounds strange.

It doesn't sound strange at all.

I just hoped he'd find whatever he's looking for. That something good would find its way to him before it's too late. She studied Hasan's face. Does that make sense?

Perfect sense.

I don't know why he stayed with me. I see hundreds of faces a day. But something about him was different. Like he was carrying something he couldn't set down.

Maybe that's just who you are. Someone who notices strangers. Someone who cares.

She reached across the table and squeezed his hand.

Maybe. I just hope he's all right. Whoever he is.

They finished dinner and cleaned up together, the conversation drifting to other things, weekend plans, her sister's visit, the trip to see his parents they kept meaning to schedule.

Later, the dishes done, they sat together in the living room, the lamp low, the city settling into its evening quiet outside the window.

Thank you for listening, she said. About the man in the coffee shop. I know it was random.

Not random. Important. The way you care about strangers is one of the things I love most about you.

She was quiet a moment. Do you think dua works? Even for people you don't know?

I think intention matters. I think good thoughts sent into the world matter, even when we never see where they land.

I hope so. I hope something good happens to him.

Maybe your prayer was exactly what he needed.

Hasan sat with that a while longer after she had gone to bed, thinking about the stranger who had caught her attention, the man in the wrinkled suit who looked like he had given up, moving through the same city, the same morning, the same coffee shop, living an entirely different life.

He said his own quiet dua for the man. Then he turned off the lamp and went to bed himself.

CHAPTER 5: The Edge

The call from HR came on a Thursday morning.

Hasan was at his desk, pretending to work, actually scrolling through articles about how the whole system was rigged against people like him. The email arrived quietly, wedged between spam and meeting invites, easy to miss.

Please meet with Karen Holloway, HR, 2:00 PM. Conference Room B.

He read it three times, then deleted it without answering.

At 1:45, Richard appeared at his desk wearing an expression that mixed sympathy and relief, and Hasan understood he could not ignore it any longer.

You got the email?

I got it.

I tried, Hasan. I want you to know that. I went to bat for you.

Sure you did.

Richard's jaw tightened. I'm not the enemy here. You've had chance after chance. Whitfield was the last one.

Whitfield was fine.

It was two weeks late and half the length it needed to be. The client walked. That's a six-figure loss.

Something cold settled in Hasan's stomach, not surprise, not even anger, just the dull recognition of something he had known was coming for a long time.

Fine, he said. Let's get it over with.

The meeting lasted twenty minutes. Severance, insurance, the return of company property, all explained in a calm, practiced voice. Hasan signed where he was told and said nothing that was not required.

Any questions? Karen asked when the paperwork was finished.

No.

We wish you well, Hasan. We hope you find something that's a better fit.

He laughed, short and bitter. Yeah. Me too.

He cleared his desk in fifteen minutes. There was not much, a mug, a dead pen, a photo from his sister's wedding he had never gotten around to hanging up.

Richard was not at his desk when Hasan left. Neither were most of his colleagues. They probably already knew. News moved through an office like fire through dry grass.

The elevator ride down was silent. The street outside moved with its usual afternoon purpose, everyone going somewhere.

Hasan walked for an hour without direction, down toward the water, across the bridge, through neighborhoods he did not recognize and did not care to. His feet moved. His mind was somewhere darker and further away.

By five he was at the bar.

You're early, the bartender said.

Got fired.

Ah. The usual?

Double.

He drank. The whiskey burned and spread its old familiar warmth. He ordered another, then another, while the happy hour crowd filled in around him, laughing about days that had not collapsed.

He should call someone. His mother. His sister. But what would he say. That this was just the newest entry in a long list of failures, that he did not know how to stop falling, that every time he tried to climb out he only dug the hole deeper.

He did not call anyone. He drank.

By nine the edges had softened enough that thinking mostly stopped. The older man was not there that night. Hasan sat alone, truly alone, surrounded by people who did not know him and would not notice if he vanished.

He stumbled home at closing. Poured another. Lit another. Stood at the window watching the lights blur.

Four missed calls from his mother. Two from his sister. One from his father. A text.

Haven't heard from you in a while. Everything okay? Call when you can.

She did not know. Nobody knew. He had not told a soul.

He opened his notes app.

Got fired today. Whitfield. Client walked. Six figures.

Doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

Ammi and Abba called. Yasmin called. Everyone's worried and none of them know why yet. I haven't told anyone.

I should tell them. I know I should. But what would I even say. I failed again. I keep failing. I don't know how to stop. That's not a conversation. That's a confession.

What is the point of any of this.

He stared at the line for a long time, then added one more.

Is this it? Is this all there is?

He saved the note and dropped the phone on the couch. The whiskey was gone. He thought about going out for more, but his legs would not cooperate. He collapsed onto the cushions, still dressed, the ceiling turning slowly above him.

Sleep came eventually. Not peaceful. Just the stopping of thought, the only relief left to him.

Outside, the city carried on, indifferent.

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The call from his supervisor came on a Thursday morning.

Hasan, can you swing by my office at two?

Everything okay?

Better than okay. Good news.

At two, Hasan sat across from David Chen, the senior partner who had hired him six years before. David was grinning, which was unusual. He was serious by nature.

Whitfield called this morning. They want to extend.

Extend? They seemed happy last week, but I didn't think...

Eighteen more months. And they asked for you specifically as lead contact. Said you were the reason they signed with us in the first place.

Warmth spread through Hasan's chest. That's incredible.

It is. Reflects well on you, and on the firm. David leaned in. I want to talk about your future here. You've proven yourself again and again. I think it's time we discussed partnership.

Partnership. The word settled into him like something that had been waiting a long time to arrive.

I don't know what to say.

Say you'll think about it. We'll talk more next week. For now, know that you're valued here. What you do matters.

He walked out feeling lighter than he had in months, maybe years, the corridor somehow brighter, the afternoon sun through the windows more gold than usual.

He called Sumayya immediately.

They're talking partnership.

Hasan! That's amazing.

Whitfield extended. Eighteen months. They asked for me specifically.

Because you're amazing. I've been telling you for years.

I know. I'm starting to believe you.

He called his parents next. His father picked up, which was rare.

Hasan? Everything all right?

Everything's wonderful, Abba. Good news at work. Wanted to share it.

He told them about Whitfield, about the partnership talk, about David's words. His mother came on the line and he could hear her crying, happy tears, the kind she saved for weddings and graduations and moments that mattered.

We are so proud of you, his father said. You know that, don't you? We've always been proud.

I know, Abba. I know.

After work he walked home through the golden evening and stopped at the florist for something special, orchids this time. Sumayya was already dressed for celebrating when he arrived, and they went to their favorite place, the small Lebanese restaurant on Court Street where they had gone on their first date. The food was good. The company was better.

To you, Sumayya said, raising her glass of mint lemonade. To everything you've built. To everything coming.

To us, Hasan said. None of this happens without you.

That's not true and you know it.

It's completely true. You believed in me before I believed in myself. You showed me what a life could look like if I actually tried.

Her eyes went bright. Now you're going to make me cry in public.

Good. You're beautiful when you cry.

She laughed and reached across the table for his hand, and they sat there while the restaurant hummed around them, two people who had found each other and held on.

Later, at home, Hasan sat by the window and opened his phone.

Partnership talk. Whitfield extended. Everything I've worked for, finally coming together.

Called Ammi and Abba. Abba said he's proud. He sounded like he meant it.

Dinner with S. Orchids on the table. She looked at me like I was worth looking at.

Alhamdulillah for this life. For the work that got me here. For the people who believed in me before I believed in myself.

Tomorrow is another chance. Another day to try and be worthy of what I've been given.

He saved the note and set the phone aside, the apartment quiet and warm around him, the whole evening still glowing faintly at the edges the way good nights sometimes do after they are already over.

CHAPTER 6: The Missed Bus

The alarm went off at 6:15 and Hasan hit snooze five times.

When he finally opened his eyes it was 6:47 and the room was gray. His head throbbed. His mouth tasted like something had died in it. The apartment smelled of cigarettes and old takeout, the particular staleness of a place that had stopped being a home and become only a location.

He had been unemployed three weeks. He had told no one. Every morning he put on a shirt and left at the usual hour, then wandered, through parks, through museums, through bars that opened early and asked no questions. In the evening he came home at the usual hour, as if nothing had changed.

The deception was exhausting, but easier than the alternative. Easier than explaining. Easier than watching disappointment settle into his mother's eyes, worry creep into his sister's voice. Easier than admitting he had failed again, that he kept failing, that he did not know how to stop.

There was supposed to be an interview today. A friend of a friend had put in a word at some consulting firm he had barely heard of. He did not expect anything to come of it. Nothing ever did.

At 7:35 he left the apartment.

The elevator stopped on three floors. Of course it did. An old woman with a small dog. A man wrestling a stroller and a crying infant. A teenager with headphones loud enough that Hasan could hear the bass from five feet away. Everyone in the building moved slowly that morning. Everyone was in his way.

He reached the corner at 7:44, just in time to watch the bus pull away.

Perfect, he muttered. Just perfect.

He stood on the corner and lit a cigarette, calculating. Fourteen minutes until the next one. He could walk toward the following stop and try to catch it there. He could take the train instead. He could skip the interview entirely and spend the day in a bar.

None of the options seemed better than any other. None of them led anywhere worth going.

He was smoking and staring at nothing when he noticed the old woman.

She was maybe seventy-five, small and stooped, struggling with two canvas bags clearly too heavy for her thin arms. She had been to the corner market, the one he passed every day without ever entering. The bags bulged with groceries, and even from twenty feet away he could see her grip slipping.

People flowed around her. The morning rush, everyone locked into their own trajectory. No one stopped. No one seemed to see her at all, invisible in the particular way old people become invisible, easy to overlook, easy to walk past.

Hasan watched her.

He was not going to help. Why would he. He had an interview. He had his own problems. He did not help people. He barely helped himself.

The bag slipped from her hand and hit the pavement.

Something inside it broke, the crack of eggs, the wet give of something surrendering. The old woman stood looking down at

the fallen bag, her shoulders dropping. Not frustration. Something heavier. Something that looked like defeat.

He did not make a conscious decision. His feet moved before his mind caught up, twelve steps across the sidewalk, bending down, lifting the bag before he could talk himself out of it.

Let me help you with that.

She looked up at him. Her eyes were pale and sharp, not the faded eyes of someone who had given up. She studied him with the particular suspicion of a city that had taught her to be wary of unexpected kindness.

I'm fine.

I know. I'm going to help anyway. Where are you headed?

She looked at him a long moment, a rumpled man in a wrinkled shirt, cigarette smell and bloodshot eyes, the unmistakable air of someone who had stopped caring what impression he made.

Three blocks, she said finally. Building with the green awning.

He took both bags and started walking. She fell into step beside him, slow, and he matched her pace without thinking about it. The interview could wait. Everything could wait.

My name's Eleanor, she said after half a block. Most people shorten it, but I've never liked that. My husband never shortened it. He's been gone eleven years and I still can't hear my own name in someone else's mouth without missing him.

I'm Hasan.

Just Hasan?

Just Hasan.

They walked in silence a while. His headache had not left, but it had gone quieter somehow. His hands were full of grocery bags, and the weight of them felt like something. Useful. Real.

You missed your bus, Eleanor said.

I did.

Somewhere important to be?

He thought of the interview, the firm he had never heard of, a job that would probably be as meaningless as the last one.

Not really.

Good. The important things rarely are where we think they are. She glanced sideways at him. You look like you're carrying something heavy. Not the bags. Something else.

Hasan did not know how to answer. No one had noticed anything about him in weeks. He had become invisible too, in his own way.

I lost my job, he heard himself say. Three weeks ago. I haven't told anyone. My parents don't know. My sister doesn't know. I've been pretending to leave for work and just wandering instead.

He had not planned to say any of it. The words simply arrived, like something that had been waiting a long time for the door to open.

Eleanor nodded slowly. That's a heavy thing to carry by yourself.

I don't know how to tell them. They'll worry. They'll want to help. And I can't explain that there's nothing to help, that this is just who I am. That this is just how things go for me.

Is that what you believe? That this is who you are?

It's what the evidence suggests.

She stopped walking. They stood in front of a dry cleaner, shirts hanging in plastic like patient ghosts.

I'm going to tell you something my husband told me, back when we were newly married. He said, Eleanor, a life isn't only what God gives you. It's also what you choose to do with it, every single day. That part is yours. I didn't understand it then. Took me thirty years to understand it. He was right, of course.

Hasan did not know what to say.

You stopped, Eleanor went on. Back there, on the sidewalk. Dozens of people walked past me. Maybe hundreds. You stopped. That tells me something about who you're choosing to be, even if you can't see it yet yourself.

I just picked up some groceries. It wasn't a big thing.

The small things are always the big thing. That's what people forget. They wait for the grand gesture, the dramatic turn. But a life is built from the small ones, the kindnesses no one sees, the choices that don't feel like choices at the time. Small things add up. My mother used to say that. She was right too.

They walked the rest of the way without speaking.

The building with the green awning was a walk-up. Eleanor stopped at the bottom of the steps and turned to face him.

I can take them from here.

He set the bags down carefully. The broken eggs had soaked through the canvas of one, but she did not seem to mind.

Are you sure? I can carry them up.

I'm sure. She reached out and touched his arm, her fingers light and warm. You did a good thing, Hasan. Not a big one. A small one. But that's what matters. The small things.

He wanted to dismiss it, to say anyone would have done the same. But he had watched everyone else flow past her, and he knew that was not true.

Thank you, Eleanor. For letting me help.

She smiled, and for a moment he could see the young woman she must have been once, the one who had loved her husband for decades and still missed him after eleven years, who had built a life out of small things, small choices, small moments of mercy.

Thank yourself, she said. You're the one who stopped.

She lifted the bags and began climbing. Hasan watched until she disappeared through the door.

Then he stood on the sidewalk alone, not entirely sure what had just happened.

Something had shifted. Something small. He could feel it in his chest, a loosening, like a door that had been stuck for years starting, finally, to move on its hinge.

He pulled out his phone.

Missed the bus. Helped an old woman carry her groceries. Her name is Eleanor. Her husband's been gone eleven years.

She said small things add up.

I don't know why that hit me the way it did. But it did.

She said I stopped. That dozens of people walked past her and I stopped. She said that tells her something about who I'm choosing to be.

I don't know who I'm choosing to be. I don't know if I've ever chosen anything.

But I stopped. That's something. That's a start.

He stared at the words a long time, then added one more line.

Show me what I'm supposed to see here.

He did not know exactly who he was speaking to. Allah, he supposed, though it had been so long since he had spoken to Him on purpose that the words felt unfamiliar in his own mouth, like a language he had once known well and let go slack from disuse.

It did not matter. He said it anyway.

He saved the note and put the phone away.

The next bus came. Hasan did not get on.

He started walking instead, vaguely toward Midtown, taking his time, noticing things, the way the light fell between the buildings, a child laughing somewhere above him, the smell of bread from a bakery he passed every day and had never once entered.

The interview could wait. Or it could not. Either way, something more important was happening.

He was paying attention.

For the first time in longer than he could remember, he was paying attention.

CHAPTER 7: Experiments

The morning after Eleanor, Hasan woke before his alarm.

This had never happened. Not once in thirty-six years. He was the kind of person who fought consciousness, who treated waking as an assault to be resisted. But that morning his eyes opened at 5:58 and stayed open, and something that felt almost like energy moved through him.

He lay still, waiting for the familiar heaviness to descend, the headache, the dread, the crushing weight of another day to endure.

It was not there.

Or it was, but muted, pushed to the edges by something else. Something that felt almost like curiosity.

He got out of bed without hitting snooze. Walked to the window. Looked out at the city coming awake below.

Show me what I'm supposed to see today.

The words came out before he could think about them, awkward, self-conscious. He felt foolish standing there talking to the empty air.

But also something else. Something that might have been hope.

He made coffee properly, in the copper pot his mother had given him years ago and he had never once used. He had to read the instructions twice. It took ten minutes, nine minutes longer than instant. But the coffee, when it was finally ready, was better than anything he had had in years.

He sat at the table and drank it slowly. The apartment was quiet. The light through the dirty windows was soft. For the first time he could remember, he was not in a hurry to be anywhere else.

His phone buzzed. A text from his mother.

Haven't heard from you in a while. Just checking in. I love you.

He stared at it. Normally he would ignore it, delete it, feel guilty for the rest of the day.

Instead he typed. Love you too, Ammi. Can I call you later?

The reply came instantly. Of course! Anytime. Abba says hi.

Tell him I say hi back.

He set the phone down, something warm settling in his chest. A small thing. A text message. But it felt like more than that. It felt like a door opening.

The interview went differently than expected.

He arrived late, as he had anticipated. But instead of inventing an excuse, he told the truth.

I apologize for the delay. I stopped to help someone on the street and lost track of time.

The interviewer, a woman in her fifties with sharp eyes, raised an eyebrow.

That's not the excuse I was expecting.

It's not an excuse. It's what happened.

Something shifted in her expression, interest, maybe, or simple surprise at hearing something honest in an interview room.

The rest of the conversation felt different too. Hasan found himself listening more than performing, asking questions instead of only answering them. When she asked why he had left his previous job, he did not spin it.

I was let go. My performance had been declining for months, longer than that, honestly. I wasn't engaged. I was going through motions. They made the right call.

She studied him for a long moment. That's remarkably self-aware.

I'm trying something new. The truth. Seeing where it leads.

She almost smiled. I appreciate the honesty. Most people in your position invent a story about seeking new challenges.

I've told enough lies to know they don't actually help.

The interview ended without an offer, but also without the usual feeling of failure. He had shown up as himself. Whatever came next would at least be built on something real.

That evening, Hasan did not go to the bar.

The habit pulled at him, his body wanted the walk, the familiar stool, the first drink that would soften every edge. But he noticed the wanting instead of simply obeying it.

What happens if I don't? he asked out loud.

No one answered. But the question hung in the air, interesting somehow. A choice instead of a compulsion.

He went home instead.

The apartment was as messy as always, but tonight he saw it differently, not evidence of failure, but a project. Something that could be changed.

He started with the dishes. A small mountain of them, some growing things he did not examine too closely. The hot water felt good on his hands. The scrubbing was almost meditative. When he finished, the counter was clear and the kitchen looked, for the first time in months, like a place a person might actually live.

He did not stop there. The clothes on the floor went into a basket. The bottles on the counter went into a bag for recycling. He opened the windows and let the apartment breathe.

Later, sitting in the clean kitchen, he called his mother.

Hasan! Twice in one day. I could get used to this.

I'm trying to do better, Ammi.

You're calling now. That's what matters.

They talked twenty minutes about nothing important and everything that mattered, her garden, his father's knee, the neighbor's dog getting into the yard again. He listened the way he had not listened in years, actually hearing her instead of waiting for his turn to speak.

Ammi? he said before hanging up.

Yes?

I have to tell you something. I lost my job. Three weeks ago. I should have told you sooner. I was ashamed.

Silence. Then, gently. Oh, beta. I wish you'd told us.

I know. I'm sorry.

You don't have to be sorry. You just have to let us be here for you. That's what family is.

I know. I'm learning that.

What will you do?

I don't know yet. But I'm trying to figure it out. I had an interview today. It might not lead anywhere, but at least I tried.

That's all anyone can ask, Hasan. Just keep trying.

After the call he sat on his couch in his clean apartment and let the quiet settle around him.

Something was happening. He did not understand it yet. But it was happening.

He opened his notes app.

Day after Eleanor.

Made real coffee. Slow. Worth it.

Texted Ammi, then called her. Told her about losing my job. Finally honest about something.

Interview. Told the truth about getting fired. Didn't die.

Didn't go to the bar. Cleaned the apartment instead.

Small things. Adding up.

Something is happening to me. I don't know what it is yet. But I don't want it to stop.

He saved the note and set the phone down.

Outside, the city hummed on. Inside, in his small clean apartment, something was shifting.

Hasan lay down on his couch, sober, and stared at the ceiling.

Tomorrow would come. More choices to make. More small things to notice.

But for now, this was enough. For now, this was everything..

CHAPTER 8: Resistance

The good days did not last.

On the fifth morning after Eleanor, Hasan woke with the old heaviness pressing down on him. The alarm had sounded for eleven minutes. The ceiling was the same ceiling it had always been. Nothing had changed. Nothing would.

He lit a cigarette before his feet touched the floor.

By ten he was at the bar.

Early start, the bartender said.

Something like that.

The first whiskey went down smooth. The second smoother. By noon the edges had softened and the questions had gone quiet, and he was exactly where he had always been, a stool, a window, a life passing on the other side of the glass.

His phone buzzed. Yasmin.

Ammi told me about the job. I'm so sorry. Can we talk? I want to help.

So his mother had told her. He had asked her not to, but he understood. Sisters talked. Mothers worried. Secrets did not stay secret in families that actually cared about each other.

He typed back. I'm fine. Just need time to figure things out.

I'm here whenever you're ready. Love you.

He stared at the message. She meant it. He knew she meant it. But he could not face her right now. Could not face anyone.

By three he was drunk, not falling-down drunk, just the steady haze of someone who had been drinking five hours. He

went outside and smoked four cigarettes in a row, watching the afternoon crowd flow past.

By evening he was home, more drunk than he had been in weeks. The apartment he had cleaned five days earlier was already reverting, dishes stacking up, clothes on the floor, the familiar evidence of his own failure.

He thought about calling his mother. He had promised to stay in touch, promised to let them help.

Instead he poured another drink.

He opened his notes app.

Day five. Or six. Can't remember.

Back at the bar. Back to old patterns.

Ammi told Yasmin about the job. Now everyone knows. Everyone's worried.

Can't face them. Can't explain. Can't be what they need me to be.

Eleanor was wrong. Small things don't add up. They just disappear.

He saved the note and dropped the phone on the couch.

The whiskey was nearly gone. He finished it, lit another cigarette, and stared at the wall.

This was who he was. This was all he would ever be.

But the next morning, something strange happened.

Hasan woke feeling terrible, hungover, ashamed, his body aching with the aftermath of too much poison. The familiar morning-after feeling he knew so well.

But alongside it, something new. A quiet voice, not quite his own, an observation arriving from somewhere he could not name.

You slipped. That's all. You didn't end. You slipped.

He lay there listening to it.

You can slip and keep walking. You can fall and get back up. The only true failure is stopping.

He did not know where the voice came from. Allah, maybe. Eleanor. Some part of himself that had not entirely given up.

It did not matter.

He got out of bed.

His head was pounding, his stomach turning. But he got out of bed.

He made coffee, real coffee, and sat with it, letting the caffeine push back against the hangover. Then he opened his phone and typed.

I slipped. I'm not going to pretend I didn't.

But I'm not stopping.

Continuing anyway.

He stared at the words. Not much, but something. A commitment. A choice.

He called Yasmin.

Hasan? Are you okay?

Not really. But I'm trying to be.

Ammi told me about the job. I've been so worried about you.

I know. I'm sorry I didn't tell you myself.

You don't have to apologize. You just have to let me be your sister. That's all I've ever wanted.

They talked half an hour, about the job, the drinking, the years of distance. Yasmin did not lecture, did not offer solutions. She just listened, just let him know she was there.

I'm pregnant, she said finally.

I know. Ammi told me. Congratulations, Yasmin. I mean it.

I wanted to tell you myself. But you weren't answering.

I know. I'm sorry.

Stop apologizing and start showing up. That's all I need.

I will. I promise.

After the call, Hasan sat in his kitchen feeling something he had not felt in years.

Not alone.

He was still struggling, still hungover, still uncertain about everything. But he was not alone. He had people who loved him, who wanted to help, people he had been pushing away out of shame.

He texted Yasmin. Coffee tomorrow? I want to see you. Talk about the baby and everything else.

Her reply came within seconds. Yes! Name the time and place. I'll be there.

He smiled despite everything.

Small things.

Adding up.

CHAPTER 9: Momentum

The coffee shop on 73rd Street was quieter than usual on a Saturday morning.

Hasan arrived early and found a corner table, ordering two coffees before Yasmin arrived. When she walked in, hand resting on the small curve of her belly, something in his chest opened wide.

Look at you, he said, standing to hug her.

Look at me, indeed. I'm the size of a small planet already and I'm barely showing.

You look wonderful.

You look sober. That's new.

I'm trying.

They sat, and he told her everything, the job loss, the weeks of pretending, the drinking he had hidden from everyone including, most days, himself. He told her about Eleanor and the groceries and the bus he had not caught. He told her about the mornings that felt different now, and the evenings that sometimes did not.

Yasmin listened without interrupting, her eyes wet more than once.

Why didn't you tell me sooner? she asked when he finished. Any of it?

Shame, I think. I didn't want you to see me the way I saw myself.

I would have loved you anyway. I do love you anyway.

I know that now. I didn't always.

She reached across the table and took his hand. What do you need from me?

Just this. Just you not giving up on me.

I was never going to give up on you, Hasan. I was just waiting for you to let me in.

They talked for two hours, past the point when the coffee had gone cold, past the point when the shop began filling with the lunch crowd. When they finally stood to leave, Yasmin pulled him into a long hug.

I'm proud of you, she said. For today. For all of it.

Don't be proud yet. I still have a lot of work to do.

That's exactly why I'm proud. You're doing the work.

He walked home through the afternoon feeling lighter than he had in longer than he could remember.

The weeks that followed took on a shape Hasan had not experienced before, not smooth, not easy, but forward. He found a job, a smaller firm willing to take a chance on him, and he showed up early every day, determined to be worth the risk someone had taken.

He did not stop drinking all at once. There were slips, a bad night here, a bad week there, but each time, the same quiet voice arrived the next morning. You slipped. You didn't end. Each time, he got up anyway. Slowly the slips grew further apart. Slowly the mornings without a headache began to outnumber the ones with.

He prayed more. Not on any fixed schedule he could have written down, not with any performance in mind, just conversations, morning and evening, sometimes only a sentence

long. Alhamdulillah for this. Help me with that. I'm trying. I'm grateful. The habit that had started as a stranger's whisper on a bad morning became, slowly, something that felt like his own voice again.

He called his parents every week. He had coffee with Yasmin every Saturday, watching her belly grow, watching himself become the brother she had always deserved and he had only recently learned how to be.

He kept the notes going, most nights.

Three weeks sober. Not perfect. But three weeks.

Bilal noticed. Said I seem different. Told him about Eleanor. He didn't laugh at me, which I appreciated.

New job starts Monday. Nervous. Grateful. Both at once.

Small things. Still adding up.

One evening, walking home from the new job, he passed the coffee shop on 73rd and, without quite deciding to, went in. He did not know why. He ordered a coffee and sat by the window, in roughly the spot where he had once seen a stranger laughing at her book and hated her for it.

He did not see her that evening. But he thought about her more than once in the weeks that followed, the woman with dark hair and an unguarded face, whose happiness had once felt like an accusation and now, in his changing life, felt more like something he was starting to believe was possible for himself too.

Small things.

Adding up.

CHAPTER 10: Sumayya

The holiday gathering was at a rooftop venue in Midtown, the kind of place Hasan would never have chosen for himself.

But Bilal had insisted. Bilal, who had stayed his colleague and then his friend through every year Hasan had tried his best to push people away, who had reached out the moment he heard about the job loss and never once let go.

It's a few hours, Bilal had said on the phone. Good people, good view. You need to leave your apartment.

I don't know anyone who'll be there.

You know me. You'll meet new people too. That's the point.

Hasan almost canceled three times. Put on a clean shirt, took it off, put on another. Smoked a cigarette for courage. Considered calling to say he was sick.

But he showed up.

The rooftop was crowded with people in holiday spirits, string lights along the railing, the skyline glittering behind them. Hasan found Bilal near the drinks table and attached himself to his side like a life raft.

You came! Bilal clapped his shoulder. I'm proud of you.

Don't be proud yet. I might leave in ten minutes.

Fair. But first, let me introduce you to some people.

Bilal led him through the crowd, his girlfriend Sara, who worked in publishing, a colleague obsessed with something to do with cryptocurrency, a handful of names Hasan immediately lost, overwhelmed by the effort of being social.

And then Sumayya.

She was standing near the edge of the roof, looking out at the city, a glass of something sparkling in her hand. Something about her seemed familiar, though he could not place it.

Sumayya, this is Hasan, Bilal said. Hasan, Sumayya, she works with Sara at the publishing house.

Sumayya turned, and Hasan felt a jolt of recognition. The coffee shop. Weeks ago. The woman with the book, the one who had been laughing, the one he had resented for looking so happy.

We've met, Sumayya said. Sort of. I remember you from that coffee shop on 73rd.

Heat rose in Hasan's face. I remember too. You were reading. Laughing at something.

It was funny. I probably looked unwell. She smiled, the same warm, unguarded smile. I actually thought about you afterward.

You did?

You looked like you were having a rough time. I made dua for you after you left. I hope that's not strange.

It's not strange at all. Something clicked into place for him. Wait. Sumayya, the woman from the coffee shop. My friend's girlfriend mentioned something once about a colleague who'd prayed for a stranger.

That's me. I'm the colleague. She laughed. Small world.

Small world, Hasan agreed, and for the first time in longer than he could remember, he meant it as a good thing.

Bilal had drifted off with Sara, leaving them alone at the railing, the city cold and beautiful below.

I owe you an apology, Hasan said.

For what?

For that day. I was in a bad place in my head. I saw you sitting there laughing at your book, looking happy, and I resented you for it. I thought you had everything figured out and I had nothing.

That's a lot to project onto a stranger.

I know. I was projecting onto everyone back then. Everything.

She studied him a moment. And now?

Now I'm trying to see people as they actually are. Not as reflections of whatever I'm feeling.

That sounds like work.

It is. But it's better than the alternative.

They talked for an hour. Then two. She told him about her job, the books she loved, the small apartment she shared with a cat named Rumi. He told her about the job loss, about Eleanor, about the small experiments in kindness and honesty he had been running on himself for months.

That's beautiful, she said. The idea that small things add up.

I don't know if I'd call it beautiful. Mostly it's just hard. But it's working, I think.

Can I tell you something?

Sure.

That day at the coffee shop, when I saw you in line, you looked so lost. I couldn't stop thinking about you afterward. I actually mentioned you to a friend that night. Said I'd made dua for you.

Hasan stared at her. That friend wouldn't happen to be Sara?

It would, actually.

And Sara is dating Bilal. Who I used to work with.

That's right.

So the woman I resented in a coffee shop is connected to my life through a friend I'd almost lost touch with.

Sumayya laughed, the sound he was already starting to love. Small things. Adding up.

They exchanged numbers before the party ended. She texted the next day, just to say it had been nice meeting him. He texted back, and they made plans for coffee.

The coffee led to dinner. The dinner led to more dinners. The dinners led to long walks through the city, learning each other's edges and corners.

Hasan found himself telling her things he had never told anyone, the drinking, the isolation, the years of slow self-destruction. She listened without judgment, sharing her own struggles, her own periods of darkness. Two people who had each been lost in their own way, finding in each other something that felt like direction.

I need to tell you something, he said one evening, a few weeks into seeing each other.

What is it?

When I first saw you in the coffee shop, I wrote something unkind in my notes. I said I hated you for looking happy.

She was quiet a moment. That's honest.

I want to be honest with you. About everything. Even the parts that aren't pretty.

Thank you for telling me. She took his hand. You know what's funny? That day, I wasn't even happy, not really. I was having a hard week at work. The laughing was probably half relief at escaping my desk for an hour.

So we were both projecting.

We were both human. That's all.

He looked at her in the evening light, this woman who had appeared in his life at the exact moment he was learning how to change, who had made dua for him without knowing him, who chose to see him as he was now and not as he had been.

I'm grateful you prayed for me, he said.

I'm grateful you helped Eleanor with her groceries.

Small things.

Adding up.

CHAPTER 11: Alignment

The two lives began to blur.

Hasan could not pinpoint exactly when it happened. There was no dramatic turn, no clear before and after, just a gradual shift, like two images slowly coming into focus until they overlapped.

He woke in his own apartment that Sunday, the morning light already golden through the blinds, and lay there a moment feeling something he had not expected to feel again. Peace. Simple and unearned and completely real.

They had been together six months. He had been sober for five, fully, completely, no exceptions he allowed himself. The small experiments in kindness had become habits, the habits had become character, and the character had become a life that looked nothing like the one he had been living the morning he missed his bus and helped an old woman carry her groceries.

He still spoke to Allah every morning, every evening. Not formally, not with any fixed form. Just conversations. Acknowledgments. Alhamdulillah for this. Help me with that. I'm grateful. I'm trying.

The voice that had started as a stranger's had become familiar. A presence. A companion for the road.

He prayed Fajr, made coffee the slow way, the copper pot, the good beans, and got dressed. He was picking up Sumayya at ten, and then his parents for lunch, and then a full evening ahead with his sister and her husband. A whole day of people he loved, stacked one on top of another.

He met her outside her building. She came down in a yellow scarf that made the gray morning look less gray.

What's on the agenda today? she asked, looping her arm through his.

Lunch with my parents. Then Yasmin and Yusuf are coming for dinner. Then you and me and nothing.

That sounds perfect.

It does, doesn't it.

Lunch was at the small restaurant near his parents' place, the one they had been going to for thirty years. His mother ordered the same thing she always ordered. His father complained about the same things he always complained about. But the conversation was different now, deeper, more honest.

You seem happy, his mother said, looking at him over her tea.

I am happy. Which still surprises me, if I'm honest.

Sumayya is good for you.

She is. But it's not only her. It's everything, the way I'm living now, the choices I'm making. It's adding up to something I never thought I could have.

His father nodded, quiet as ever, but his eyes were soft in a way that said more than words could.

We're proud of you, beta, he said finally. We've always been proud. But especially now.

Thank you, Abba. That means everything.

Yasmin arrived at Hasan's apartment at five with Yusuf, a bottle of sparkling cider, and a belly that had started to show. Hasan hugged her carefully, aware of the small life growing inside her, the niece or nephew he would meet in a few months.

How are you feeling?

Enormous. Tired. Emotional. All the good stuff.

You look beautiful.

You're contractually obligated to say that. But thank you.

Dinner was simple, rice Sumayya had learned from his mother, a salad Hasan put together, warm bread from the bakery down the street. They ate around the small table, full of the comfortable noise of family and friends.

So, Yasmin said after dinner. When are you two making it official?

Hasan glanced at Sumayya, who was studying her tea with sudden intensity.

Making what official?

Don't play dumb. When's the wedding?

We haven't discussed...

Yes, you have. I can tell by the way you two just looked at each other. Spill.

Hasan felt his face flush. He looked at Sumayya, who was now looking back at him, a small smile on her lips.

Actually, he said slowly, I've been thinking about that.

Hasan. Her voice was soft.

Not here. Not this exact minute. But soon. Maybe. If you'd be interested in that sort of thing.

That sort of thing being?

Me. Forever. The whole complicated mess of it.

Yasmin was practically vibrating. Yusuf was trying not to look like he was listening. And Sumayya was looking at Hasan

with the eyes that had seen all his darkness and chosen to stay anyway.

I might be interested in that, she said.

Yeah?

Yeah.

Yasmin made a sound somewhere between a squeal and a sob. Hasan barely heard her. He was too busy looking at Sumayya, feeling the future open up in front of them, vast and unfamiliar and completely worth it.

Later, after Yasmin and Yusuf had gone, after Sumayya had gone home for the night and the apartment was quiet, Hasan sat by the window and pulled out his phone.

Something is happening. Something I never thought possible.

Dinner with Yasmin. Talked about the future. With Sumayya. A future that includes both of us.

I'm not fixed. I'm not perfect. I'm still the same person who drank too much and pushed everyone away and wasted years of my life.

But I'm also someone new. Someone who shows up. Someone who pays attention. Someone building something worth having.

Two lives becoming one.

Small things adding up.

Eleanor was right. She was right about everything.

He saved the note and looked out at the city, and said, quietly, the same conversation he had every night now.

Alhamdulillah. For this. For all of it. I could have caught that bus. I almost did. Everything would be different. But I stopped. That's where it all started.

Two lives had become one.

And that one life was more than either had ever imagined alone.

CHAPTER 12: Harvest

Years passed the way years do when you are paying attention, slowly and quickly all at once.

Hasan and Sumayya were married in a small ceremony in the garden behind his parents' house, the same garden where his mother had grown tomatoes for thirty years. Yasmin stood beside Sumayya, her daughter now three years old and serving as an enthusiastic, only partially cooperative flower girl. Bilal stood beside Hasan, cracking jokes to ease the nerves.

His parents sat in the front row, his mother in tears before the ceremony even began, his father holding her hand with an expression that tried to be composed and failed completely. An elder from the community recited the marriage vows, and when it was done the whole garden erupted, laughter, blessings, someone's uncle attempting a poem no one had asked for.

Hasan felt the gathered love of everyone who had watched him fall and rise and slowly learn to become someone worth marrying.

Children came. First a daughter. They wanted to name her after the woman on the sidewalk who had changed everything, and searching for something that carried her memory, Sumayya found it. Noor. Close enough to Eleanor in the mouth to feel like the same gift, wrapped differently, and its own kind of true besides. Light. One of the names of Allah Himself. They named their daughter Noor, and every time Hasan said it he thought of a woman he had not seen in years, carrying groceries up three flights of stairs. Then a son, whom they named Ibrahim, after Hasan's father, who wept when he heard the name.

I never thought, his father started, then stopped, overcome.

I know, Abba. Me neither.

They settled into a house not far from his parents, close enough to visit every week. Sunday dinners became a ritual, four generations around the table, his parents, Yasmin and her family, Hasan and Sumayya and the children, everyone talking over everyone else, the good noise of a family that had chosen to stay close.

Prayer had long since stopped being a struggle. Hasan prayed all five now, on time, every day, Sumayya a step behind him, her own prayer running alongside his without ever needing to touch it. It was the same practice his father had shown him decades before, in a small room that smelled like carpet and old books, and now Hasan was the one passing it forward, to his own children, the way it had once been passed to him. He no longer thought of prayer as something he was working to hold onto. It had simply become the shape of his day, morning to night, the same way breathing was the shape of staying alive. He could not have told you the day that shift finished happening, only that it had.

Hasan kept his notes, not as often as before, but consistently. Moments. Observations. Gratitude.

Noor's first day of school. She held my hand all the way to the door, then let go without looking back. Proud and heartbroken in the same breath.

Ibrahim learned to ride a bike today. Fell three times. Got up every time. When he finally made it down the block he looked at me like he'd conquered the world.

Ammi's seventieth birthday. Whole family together. She said it was the best day of her life. I believe her.

Abba's not doing well. The doctors say his heart is weakening. We don't talk about it directly. We just spend more time together, small projects, the porch, storing up memories against the loss we both know is coming.

The years accumulated. His father's health declined slowly, then quickly. Hasan visited more often, helping with small tasks, sitting on the porch talking about nothing, letting the silence carry what words could not.

One evening, a few weeks before the end, they sat together watching the sun go down.

I need to tell you something, his father said.

What is it?

I'm proud of you. I know I've said it before. But I want to say it again. The way you turned your life around. The family you've built. It's more than I ever let myself hope for.

You showed me how, Abba. You and Ammi. Even when I wasn't paying attention, you were showing me.

We did our best. That's all anyone can do.

Your best was enough. More than enough. Hasan took his father's hand, thinner now than he remembered it, the skin loose over bones that had once felt unbreakable. I need to thank you too, Abba. Not just for the last few years. For all of it. For teaching me to pray before I even understood what I was saying. For showing me what it looks like to love Allah in the small hours when no one is watching. For the good years and the years I made hard for you and Ammi both. You never once let go of me, even when I'd let go of everything else. I don't think I ever thanked you properly for that.

His father's eyes filled, and he did not try to hide it.

That means more to a father than almost anything, he said. Watching his son come back to prayer. But it was never only that. It was watching you become kind again. Watching you show up for people. Watching the love in you find its way back out. The prayer and all the rest of it grew from the same root. I could not have asked for one without the other.

His father nodded, eyes wet in the fading light.

Look after your mother when I'm gone. She'll pretend she doesn't need help. She will.

I will. I promise.

And keep being the man you've become. Keep paying attention. Keep choosing the right things.

I will, Abba. Every day.

They sat together until the sun was gone, then went inside, where Hasan's mother was cooking and the house smelled like home.

Ibrahim Rahman, Hasan's father, passed three weeks later, peacefully, surrounded by family. Hasan held his hand at the end, said goodbye, watched the man who had shaped him take his last breath.

The grief was immense. So was the gratitude, for the time reclaimed, the relationship rebuilt, the love spoken before it was too late.

The small community hall could barely hold everyone who came to pray for him. Hasan spoke afterward, about the birdhouse they had built together one summer, about lessons taught through example more than words, about the small things that had added up to a life well lived.

My father believed in showing up, Hasan said. He believed love was proven through presence, not just felt in private. He taught me that once when I was too young to understand it, and again when I was finally old enough. I am who I am because of who he was. I intend to spend the rest of my life trying to be worthy of it.

Afterward, his mother held him tight.

He loved you so much, she said.

I know, Ammi. I loved him too.

You made him so proud. These last years especially. Watching you become the man you are, it meant everything to him.

He meant everything to me.

They stood together, bound by loss and love, while the rest of the mourners drifted quietly away.

Life continued. His mother lived another eight years, close enough to visit often, present for birthdays and ordinary Tuesdays alike, watching her grandchildren grow, dispensing advice sometimes wanted and sometimes not, keeping her husband's memory alive in the way she still spoke of him, gently, in the present tense.

When she passed, it was peaceful, Hasan beside her, as she had once been beside his father.

We belong to Allah, and to Him we return, she said near the end, quiet and unafraid. That's where I'm going, Hasan. Back to where I started.

I know, Ammi.

And keep living, Hasan. Don't stop living just because I'm gone.

I won't. I promise.

Her last breath was a sigh. And then she was gone, and Hasan was fifty-three years old, and both his parents had gone ahead of him, and the world felt both emptier and somehow fuller than it had before.

He wrote that night.

Ammi is gone. She died the way she lived, gracefully, without complaint, thinking of everyone but herself.

Abba waited eight years for her. They're together now, inshallah.

I miss them already. Will miss them always.

But I'm grateful. For the time we had. For the repair we made. For every Sunday dinner and every phone call and every small moment that added up to a life full of love.

They taught me what matters. They showed me how to live.

Now it's my turn to show my own children. To pass it on. To keep the small things adding up.

He saved the note and closed his phone.

Sumayya found him in his chair by the window, staring out at the night.

How are you?

Sad. Grateful. Both at once.

That sounds about right.

She sat beside him, her hand in his, and they watched the city lights together.

They would be proud of you, she said.

I hope so. I tried to be worthy of them.

You were. You are.

He leaned his head against hers, feeling the warmth of her presence, the comfort of a love that had carried him through decades.

Small things, he said.

Adding up.

All the way to the end.

CHAPTER 13: Peace

The house had a porch that faced west.

Hasan sat there most evenings now, watching the sun go down, a cup of tea warming his hands. Seventy years old and still grateful for the view. Still grateful for everything.

The children were grown. Noor was a doctor, married with two children of her own, living a few hours away. Ibrahim taught school in the city, coaching basketball at the same building where Hasan's mother had once volunteered. They visited when they could, called when they couldn't, kept alive the connections Hasan had spent a lifetime learning how to build.

Sumayya was inside, probably reading, probably waiting for him to come watch their show together. They had been married thirty-three years. Still held hands walking down the street. Still laughed at each other's jokes. Still chose each other every morning, the way Eleanor, all those years ago on a sidewalk, had told him love actually worked.

He thought about Eleanor often, wondered what had become of her. She would be well past ninety now, if she were still alive. Maybe she had passed on, reunited with the husband who had been gone eleven years when they met. Maybe she was sitting on her own porch somewhere, watching her own sunset, thinking about the young man who had once stopped to help with her groceries.

Small things adding up.

He pulled out his phone and opened the notes app, thousands of entries now, spanning decades, a record of a life lived with attention.

Another sunset. Another day.

S. made soup for dinner. The good kind, the one her mother taught her.

Noor called. The baby's finally sleeping through the night. She sounded tired and happy.

Ibrahim's team is headed to the playoffs. So proud of him. So proud of both of them.

Thinking about the life I almost lived. The one where I caught the bus. The one where I didn't stop.

Glad I stopped. Glad every single day.

He saved the note and set the phone aside.

The sun touched the horizon, painting the sky orange and rose. He watched it go down, feeling the familiar peace that came with evenings, with endings, with the knowledge that he had lived well.

His morning conversations with Allah had become evening ones too now. Less asking for guidance, more simply giving thanks.

Alhamdulillah for this life, he said quietly. For Sumayya. For the children. For Ammi and Abba. For Eleanor. For everyone who helped me become who I am.

He paused, watching the last sliver of sun disappear.

Thank You for the missed bus. Thank You for the broken eggs. Thank You for the small moments that turned into everything.

The sky darkened slowly. Stars appeared. The distant hum of the city carried on.

Hasan sat in the quiet, feeling the peace of a life completed. Not perfect, never perfect. He had made mistakes along the way,

hurt people he loved, fallen back into old patterns more times than he wanted to count. But he had gotten up. Every time. He had kept choosing the small good things, kept letting them accumulate, kept paying attention.

And now here he was. Seventy years old. Loved. Grateful. At peace.

Sumayya appeared at the door.

Coming in?

In a minute.

Don't stay out too long. It's getting cold.

I know. Just watching the stars.

She went back inside, and Hasan sat a moment longer.

He thought of the young man he had been, the one with the hangover and the empty apartment and the dusty prayer rug folded on the shelf, the one who had once written, What's the point of any of this.

He wished he could go back and tell that young man what was coming. The love. The family. The purpose. The peace. All of it grown from a single moment on a sidewalk, a single decision to stop.

But he could not go back. He could only live forward. And he had, day after day, small thing after small thing.

He stood slowly, knees complaining the way old knees do, and looked up at the stars once more.

Thank You, he said again.

Then he went inside, where Sumayya was waiting, where the soup was warm, where the rest of his life was still unfolding, one small moment at a time.

CHAPTER 14: Enough

His body was failing the way bodies do. Heart slower. Breath shorter. Joints complaining about decades of use. But his mind stayed clear, his gratitude stayed sharp, his conversations with Allah remained daily.

Alhamdulillah for this, he would say each morning. Thank You for another day.

And each evening. Alhamdulillah for this. Thank You for another day.

Simple. Repetitive. But never empty. Never routine. Each one real. Each day genuinely received as a gift.

Sumayya was slowing too, though she refused to admit it. Still made dinner every night. Still read her books. Still held Hasan's hand whenever they sat together.

We're getting old, he told her one evening.

Speak for yourself. I'm aging gracefully.

You're aging beautifully. I'm aging like an old potato.

She laughed, the sound he had loved for more than thirty years.

A handsome potato.

The handsomest.

They sat together in the living room, the television on, neither watching it, just enjoying each other's company, the miracle they had almost missed, the life they had almost never lived.

The last week came softly.

Hasan knew it was the last week. Not through any doctor's word, and not through anything the body told him. It came the way certainty had always come to him since that first stumbling conversation in an empty kitchen decades before, quietly, from somewhere past reasoning, the same place his morning prayers came from. He had spent a lifetime learning to trust that kind of knowing over anything a chart or a doctor could tell him, and he trusted it now.

He spent his days surrounded by family. Noor flew in. Ibrahim came every evening after work. The grandchildren sat with him, telling him about their lives, holding his hand, saying goodbye without saying the word.

Sumayya never left his side, sleeping in the chair beside his bed, waking when he woke, holding his hand when the nights grew hard.

I love you, he told her, over and over. I love you so much.

I know. I love you too.

I'm sorry for leaving first.

Don't be sorry. Just stay a little longer.

He tried. He stayed as long as he could.

On the last morning, Hasan woke to sunlight streaming through the window. Sumayya was asleep in her chair, her face peaceful in the early light. The house was quiet. The world was still.

He lay there a long while, feeling the warmth of the sun, listening to her breathe, thinking about everything.

The missed bus. Eleanor. The broken eggs on the sidewalk. The moment he chose to stop.

The small experiments in kindness. The days of failure and the getting up again. The slow accumulation of choices that had built this whole life.

His parents, waiting for him somewhere. His children, who would carry it forward. His grandchildren, who would carry it forward after them.

Small things adding up across generations. Love passed hand to hand, heart to heart.

He reached for his phone one last time and opened the notes app, fingers weak but certain.

It was enough.

He saved the note and set the phone down.

Then he closed his eyes and spoke once more to the One he had been speaking to for decades.

Thank You for all of it. The hard years and the good ones. The people You placed in my path. The chances You gave me to choose better. Thank You for Sumayya. For the children. For Ammi and Abba. Thank You for Eleanor. Thank You for the missed bus.

He paused, feeling the peace of it. The completeness.

Thank You for letting me stop. Thank You for showing me what mattered. Thank You for this life.

The sun was warm on his face. Sumayya stirred in her chair.

Hasan?

I'm here, he said.

How do you feel?

Grateful, he said. At peace.

Good. She took his hand. That's good.

They sat together as the morning brightened, as the house slowly filled with the sounds of family waking, as life continued its endless turning all around them.

And then, quietly, without struggle or pain, Hasan let go.

His last breath was a sigh.

His said Shahadatayn, words were the ones he had said every day of his life since the morning he stopped for an old woman's groceries.

Epilogue: The Ripple

The funeral prayer was held on a Sunday, the kind of bright autumn day Hasan had always loved.

The small hall was full, family, friends, colleagues from decades past, people touched by his life in ways large and small, some he would not have remembered, all of whom remembered him. The community gathered close, offering their prayers, offering comfort to the family that would carry his memory forward.

Noor, his daughter, spoke first, about her father's patience, about the way he had always listened, about the name he and her mother had given her, chosen to carry the memory of a woman who had changed his life on a sidewalk long before she was born.

Ibrahim spoke next, about Sunday dinners and basketball games and the birdhouse his grandfather had built that still hung in his own backyard. About learning to be a man by watching his father become one.

Sumayya spoke last, about love. About choosing each other every day. About a young man in a coffee shop who had seemed so lost, and the old man who had held her hand every night for thirty-three years.

He used to say small things add up, she told the gathered crowd. He learned that from a woman named Eleanor, on a sidewalk, a long time ago. And he proved it true every day of his life. Every small choice. Every small kindness. Adding up to something beautiful, alhamdulillah.

Afterward, people gathered to share memories, the colleague Hasan had helped find work, the neighbor whose walk he had shoveled without being asked, the stranger he had once spoken to on a train who never forgot the conversation.

Small things. Adding up. Rippling outward in ways no one could fully measure.

Six months later, Sumayya sat on the porch at sunset, where she and Hasan had sat together so many times.

She held his phone, scrolling through the notes app, thousands of entries, a whole life recorded in fragments.

She stopped on one from years before, early in their relationship, before they were married.

Met someone. Sumayya. I didn't try to be anyone but myself. She seemed to like that anyway.

She smiled through tears.

A few entries later.

Small things adding up. Building something I can almost see now.

And later still.

Two lives becoming one.

She read until the sun went down, until the stars came out, until the night wrapped around her like a blanket.

The last entry was the one he had written on his final morning.

It was enough.

She sat with those words a long time.

Then she set the phone down, looked up at the stars, and said what she knew he would have wanted her to say.

Alhamdulillah. For all of it.

The night was quiet. The stars were bright. And somewhere, she believed, Hasan was at rest.

Still grateful.

Still at peace.

Still adding up the small things, wherever he was now, inshallah, in the company of the One he had spent a lifetime learning to speak with honestly.

Before You Go

I wrote this book for readers like you. People who believe that small choices matter. People who know transformation happens quietly, one day at a time.

If Hasan's story resonated with you, I'd be grateful if you'd share that with others.

A brief review helps readers find books that might change something for them. It helps me continue writing stories worth telling.

You don't need to summarize the plot. Just share what you felt.

Here is the link and QR code for your convenience:



<https://www.amazon.com/review/create-review?asin=B0H8DTHR72>