



The Fog of Madinah

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JOURNEY TO ELDORIA



Layla stands with her family as they prepare for a journey to Madinah under a heavy, expectant sky. While her aunts are packed and ready to depart, her uncles remain behind, their refusal to join casting a strange shadow over the start of the trip.



Inside the moving car, the atmosphere is quiet as Layla rests her head comfortably on her mother's lap. In the back seat, her brother's wife suffers through the journey, her sickness prompting the aunts to whisper about the hardships of her current pregnancy.



The car pulls into a gas station shrouded in a thick, gray fog that makes it impossible to tell if it is dawn or dusk. Her paternal aunt appears through the mist with a disturbing, fixed smile, urging them to hurry toward the bathrooms before the crowds arrive.



The path to the facilities is a steep, crumbling slope that causes Layla to lose her footing and nearly tumble into the gray abyss. Her mother catches her with a sharp word and a tight, protective grip, leading her forcefully down toward the weathered building below.



They reach a desolate, one-story structure surrounded by towering, ancient trees that seem to lean in toward the yard. Two elderly women with distorted, frightening features sit in silence on straight-backed chairs, one dressed entirely in somber black garments.



At the entrance, a crowd dressed in vibrant turquoise and dark pink pajamas engages in a chaotic, ritualistic clash. Layla watches in confusion as they carry someone through the fray, but her mother commands her to look away and ignore the unsettling sight.



The interior corridor is a nightmare of crowded, bizarre figures and inexplicable behavior that feels both frantic and normal. Layla focuses on her task at a solitary sink, performing her ablution while a mysterious, shifting figure watches her from the shadows with a haunting intensity.



After finishing her prayers, Layla enters a room to find her grandmother and uncles gathered around a feast of rice and meat. The reunion is cut short when scorpions begin to crawl over the table, yet her mother and sister brush the venomous creatures away with a terrifying lack of fear.



Layla refuses to eat and insists on finishing her prayers, but as she rises from the ground, her family vanishes entirely. She is left facing a mocking man with long red hair and a dark-haired woman, leading Layla to lash out in anger and seize the man's hair to stop his taunting laughter.



The world suddenly plunges into total darkness, and Layla finds herself alone, surrounded by a circle of glowing red eyes staring from the void. Realizing that fear is her only weakness, she calms her racing heart and begins to walk bravely forward into the dark, searching for the road back home.