

The Veiled Pearl

And other stories

The Veiled Pearl

And other stories

Mirjam de Hoop

Author: Mirjam de Hoop

First Published in the Netherlands in 1994: De gesluierde parel

Translation by Mirjam de Hoop

Edited by Jackie Rowe

Cover design: Mirjam de Hoop

ISBN: 9789403615950

© mirjam de hoop

Contents

1. In the Golden Cage	8
2. The Veiled Pearl	39
3. Na'ama	46
4. Yusuf and Ahmad	59
5. The Heart of Stone	72
6. Slave of Allah, Child of God	81
7. That Dark Night	100
8. Aziza, the Precious One	110

To my friends

Dank jullie wel!

Thank you!

Kiitos!

Shoekran!

شكراً

FOREWORD

To protect my friends, names have been changed. And no, not everything you will read, has happened exactly like that, though it could very well have, except maybe that the camel most likely would not have spoken!

Mirjam de Hoop

The author

1

IN THE GOLDEN CAGE

I was there when she had to wear her veil for the very first time. She was about 11 years old then.

Suddenly she was not allowed to play outside anymore. Never again could she go shopping without a veil. There she was, in a long black outfit, a skirt, a black cape over her shoulders, a black cloth covering her hair and her face. Even her eyes had to be covered with a double layer of veils.

No boy was ever allowed to look into her beautiful brown eyes anymore. Huda felt like a bird that was suddenly caught and put into a cage.

Sometimes she was allowed out of her cage to flap around a little, like that one time that they let her go with me to the beach. She and her family had moved from the capital of Yemen to a town at the Red Sea. I spent a few days with her and stayed with her in her room.

Before we went to sleep, I read from my Bible as I was accustomed to and I prayed. I gave in to the urge to lay my hands on her head and bless her.

The next day we went to the seaside. It was a hot day. In my long trousers and my t-shirt with long sleeves I stepped into the lovely cool water of the Red Sea and went for a swim. Oh, how she would have wanted to do the same! But that was absolutely no option for her. Her black veil flapping in the wind, her eyes filled with longing, she then decided to go and look for shells.

She found seashells on the seashore...

*Excitedly she ran up to me,
As a child so happy,
With a shell in her hand,
Which she found on the sand.
I found a pearl, she exclaimed,
Treasuring the shell close to her heart.
Full of expectation she opened it,
Only to find it completely empty.
Feeling disappointed and looking ever so
sad,
She walked away...
O that she may
Find the Pearl of Great Worth one day!*

Before going to bed that night, she asked me to pray for her again; she had felt something special the night before she told me.

The next day she had to go back into her cage, taking care of her younger brothers and sisters, helping with the cooking and the cleaning.

She was no longer a child. No longer allowed to play.

She was getting prepared for marriage. She was being made ready to 'Enter the Golden Cage', a Yemeni synonym for 'getting married'.

In a year or two her father or her brother would find a husband for her. And she would not be allowed to even see him before the wedding. (Maybe, from behind the curtains, if she knew he was coming to visit her family.)

Hopefully, he would be nice.

I was there, the days she got married. On the third day of her wedding, which up till that moment was only a party for the women, Huda would meet her husband for the very first time.

Together with her father and her aunt we took her away, her white wedding dress and white wedding veil hidden beneath the hot black veil. Even her hands were covered by black gloves, and I could feel her fear as she tightly held on to my hand, all the

way in our car while the driver was honking like all the other drivers behind us.

Gunshots in the air announced the arrival of the bride. We had come to the house of the groom, where Huda was going to start her new life. The first time ever away from home, to live with an unknown husband and his unknown parents, brothers, sisters and sisters-in-law.

The men continued partying, while we put Huda on a chair in her new bedroom. The chair next to her was still empty. What would the man be like that would take his place on the other chair next to her? What would he look like? Would he love her? Would she love him?

Father told us it was time to go. It hurt my heart to leave her like that. I hugged her and blessed my precious, scared Muslim friend in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

*Oh, dear imprisoned little bird,
I'm not able to free you out of your cage,
I can't take your veils away,
But there's Someone Who can
There's Someone Who can free you,
Even while you're still inside your cage,*

*Someone Who can give you freedom
Underneath your veil and give you
Peace.*

*There's Someone Who knows you,
And loves you so very very much!
That's why I came to your country,
To tell you that!*

At the door I turned and looked around once more. I saw the fear in her eyes. It made me cry!

If I had been born in Yemen and had walked around here as a child – barefoot, dirty face – I would not have known any better. I would have been running in the dusty streets, pushing a wheel in front of me holding a stick. Playing with a tin, connected to a wire I would have been as happy as a child in my Western country is happy with its bike or skateboard. And maybe I would be playing with marbles, just like the children in my own country.

I would just look a little different. I would wear trousers underneath my dress and would wear a headscarf. I would speak a different language, Arabic. and would write that from right to left. And if I had been a boy, I would wear a skirt or a robe.

From the outside lots would seem different, but not so on the inside. On the inside all people are

similar. All have been created by the same God Who so longs to be their Father. But they don't know that over there in Yemen. They don't know that the Lord Jesus came to show them exactly that! To show them how much God loves them!

That is why I went, to tell them that!

The Yemen (Sheba)

After a flight of about nine hours over the desert of Saudi Arabia, I landed in Sana'a, the capital of the country, which was once called 'Arabia Felix', 'Happy Arabia'. Long before that, in the time of King Solomon, its name was 'Sheba'.

Yemen, the land of the queen of Sheba. Even this very day you can still see the ruins of her palace and those of the temples where people used to worship the god of the sun and the god of the moon.

One day the queen of Sheba was told about a very wise king in Jerusalem. His name was Solomon. This is how the story is told in the schoolbooks in Yemen:

'Once upon a time there lived a queen in Yemen. Her name was Bilquis. She was praying to the god of the sun and to the god of the moon.