

## CHAPTER ONE

“I’m not happy with this relationship!”

That’s what I said to my wife, Mariam, before she fainted and I panicked. I didn’t have my cell phone with me, because she’d hidden it from me earlier that evening, so I ran outside our 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Merrick, New York, apartment to call for help; unfortunately, the weather conditions didn’t help. With the streets covered in piles of snow and the cold breeze almost unbearable, no one was outside to help me.

I ran back upstairs, but the door was locked. Frantic, I then raced back downstairs to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and knocked on my landlord's door. When she opened the door, the curious look on her face asked every question she possibly had. I apologized for banging on her door and explained the situation to her, after which I asked for her phone, called 911, and requested the operator to send an ambulance. Not long afterward, the ambulance arrived with a police officer, who told me to step into the other room - as if the situation were a domestic disturbance.

I tried to eavesdrop on the discussion the paramedic and the police officer were having with my wife in the living room. After I heard her explain to them she was fine and didn't want to go to the hospital, the officer had her sign a waiver, then they left. I remained in the room while my landlord stayed to comfort my wife, but as soon as the clock hit nine, she touched her gold necklace and looked at the clock. For some reason this made me superstitious, so I stormed into the living room and asked her to leave. She was surprised at my request, and Mariam was dumbstruck as well, but I was resolute. Not long after my landlord left, my wife fell asleep on the couch.

*I should be the one sleeping, not her,* I thought to myself. It had been weeks since I'd had a good night's sleep, and I was angry and disappointed at my wife's selfishness and the thought that she couldn't care less about me.

I went to look for my cell phone in my son's nursery, where we kept our clothes in the wardrobe. I had quite a few calls to make; to my mother, my brother in Deer Park, my sister-in-law in Merrick, my sister, 911 – whomever I could think of at that moment, I just had to call. When I couldn't find my phone in the wardrobe, I went through three of Mariam's handbags lying on the bathroom floor.

I grew even more paranoid when I saw her and my son, Ali's, passports and my and Ali's hospital records in one purse.

“What's she planning?” I asked myself.

Finally, I heaved a sigh of relief as I found my old BlackBerry Storm 2 and a charger in one of the handbags. After I left the phone to charge in the bathroom outlet, I continued searching through Mariam's bag and found her bachelor's and law degrees in another handbag. A lot of conspiracy theories began running through my mind. Was she planning to run away? Was I on some hit list? It got to the point where I started to consider my wife was a terrorist and I was some American hero waiting to be recognized.

I stormed out of the nursery bathroom and ran to our bedroom. Once there, I opened the windows on the right side and cried out for help. I saw my Iranian neighbors peeking to see what was going on, but they didn't offer to help out. As the father peered through the bathroom window, his daughter peeked through the bedroom window. When they saw me looking out at

them, they suddenly looked away; they appeared well-informed of what was happening in my home.

I closed the window and went to the back to check out my Christian neighbors just a little farther away; the Christmas ornaments and decorations outside their house informed me of their religion. I yelled through the window, but they didn't seem to want to get involved.

I went downstairs and noticed a large package that had been delivered by UPS; it was my son's high chair. I brought it upstairs, thinking there would be a cell phone inside. After I opened the box, took every item in it out, and found no cell phone, I put everything back in. I then went to the kitchen windows facing the front and left side of the building and yelled for help yet again; still, no one came, nobody cared.

All the shouting had probably woken Ali up. I picked him up and smelled a horrible stench coming from him, so I began to undress him. He was wrapped in several layers of clothing, and the final layer was all black. With a disgusted face, I finally confirmed where the smell was coming from; the thought of black magic crossed my mind as I stared at the black feces. I brought Ali to the bathroom and gave him a warm bath, after which I dried him off and carried him to the bedroom, wrapping him in a soft green blanket. I couldn't find any clean clothes for him to wear; everything I found was black and smelled of urine. Again, I felt the paranoia...what was my wife doing to my son?

I worried for Ali, because he was just ten months old, developmentally delayed, and had a seizure disorder. "Did Mariam give him his seizure medication tonight? Should I give it to him?" I blankly asked myself.

Still undecided, on instinct I went to the medicine cabinet and took out the bottle of Kepra; when I noticed it looked polluted, the level of distrust for my wife I'd grown over the last three weeks grew even more. Agitated, I locked the door to the bedroom and started to empty the closet. I brought everything out of the closet – clothes, boxes, and suitcases – and piled it all into a mountain on the bed.

I was trying to create a scenery for spending the night and finally, before turning the lights off, there were two wall ornaments I wanted to take off but was unable to; one read "Allah", and the other read "Muhammad". They were hanging from a nail, so I decided to turn them over instead. My son's night light illuminated the room, and with the windows open, I heard the LIRR train roar through in the background. I unplugged my BlackBerry from the charger, held my son to my chest, and sat down inside the closet before closing its door. That was where we were going to spend the rest of the night.

When I powered on my phone, I noticed it hadn't charged the whole time it was plugged in. Although I felt frustrated, strangely, I believed there was still hope.

"If you can hear me, I need some help," I whispered into the phone. It wasn't on, but I had the feeling someone just might be listening. I was scared for my life.

I was six-foot-two and weighed two hundred twenty pounds, so I was very uncomfortable staying in the closet. I kept changing positions, from one side of the wall to the other. The only comfort I found was in my son, holding him close to me, protecting him, and him protecting me.

I suddenly panicked when it appeared someone had come into the room. As I saw shadows through the space at the bottom of the door, many questions raced through my mind in a

split second. Was it my wife? My landlord? Did they know we were in the closet? Was it the devil? The police? What would happen if they discovered me in the closet? The door wasn't locked, and I wasn't sure if there even was a lock. I pulled my arm up to check, and to my surprise and momentary excitement, I found there was a lock, so I turned it. Now locked in, I stayed quiet for a few seconds, then suddenly yelled for whoever it was outside the door to go away.

It was sweltering in the closet, and I'd lost track of time. As I searched the floor for something to protect me and Ali, I felt papers, a pen, and other things I couldn't recognize in the dark. There was absolutely nothing that could be used as a weapon. I scaled the walls, too, and finally found a metal rod. Clenching my son with my left hand and the rod with the other, I was prepared for a fight. A few minutes later, though, everything suddenly became calm. I saw no more shadows outside the door, and the air inside the closet began to cool. I placed the rod back against the wall and checked my son to see if he was hot or cold, but he was fine. While sitting, I cracked the door to see if anyone was there, but it was quiet and the wind blew in some soothing air. That's when I heard the train whistle for the third time that night. It was either 2 or 3 in the morning, as I knew the LIRR operated every hour during the late hours.

Suddenly, I heard incoherent whispers. Was my wife up? Was she talking to our landlord? Was it all in my head? I didn't even know what to think. All my senses gave way to jittering.

My back had started to give in as I tried to fall asleep in the small closet, and I was about to put my mind at rest – when I suddenly heard yelling; it came from the other room and sounded more like a man than my wife. My mind was boggling as I contemplated whether to go out for a moment. I then grabbed the metal rod, unlocked the door, and stepped out into the bedroom as the

yelling continued.

“You are the devil! I want you to leave!” I found myself screaming from the middle of the room. As the yelling turned into crying, I realized it was definitely my wife. I recited, *Ayat-ul-Kursi* out loud before things became quiet, then I said in a low tone, “I want you to leave, Devil! Just open the door and go.” Hearing nothing, I rushed back into the closet.

Suddenly, I heard her voice again. “Adam, I need Ali...I need you,” Mariam kept repeating from the living room.

I began to think it was time to talk, then I quickly reasoned it could be a trap; she probably wanted me to come out and get violent. So many thoughts were racing through my mind all night that made me unsure of what to do, but I ultimately summoned the courage and stepped out of the closet. I slowly walked towards the door and looked under it to see if my wife was standing there; discovering she wasn't, I opened the door and saw her lying on the couch. I screamed because I was scared to see her, and she did the same in response.

I ran back into the bedroom and peeked out of the door before closing and locking it, then I went back into the closet, where I sat down with my son and locked the door. I was very frantic at that point, and I had no idea what was going on. I kept hearing loud voices in my head saying, “You are going to die today! Everybody is going to die! There is no hope for you!”

Immense heat was radiating from the walls of the room, making the closet extremely hot. I was sweating profusely as I started reciting certain *Surahs* from the Quran. I started by quoting the *Four Qul's*, then said *Astaghfirullah* - seeking forgiveness from God and scaring the Devil away.

After about five minutes, I still heard the voices in my head, but they were growing quieter. As I continued reciting from the Quran, the voices stopped and everything pretty much cooled down; an apparent climate change had taken place, as the room was cold and I wasn't sweating as before. I checked my son to see if he was okay, and he was fine; he was neither hot nor cold in the blanket I'd wrapped him in, sleeping in my arms.

A cool breeze entered through the bottom space of the door, which made me relax a bit as I checked to see if it was still locked; I didn't know if I'd locked it or not. I leaned my head back on the wall of the closet and started to worry about my wife. I began to feel extreme concern, love, and care for her well-being, wondering if she was okay.

I asked myself some bizarre questions: "What if she's being abused? Did someone do something terrible to her as a child? Is that why she's acting the way she is?"

All these conclusions and questions kept coming to me without any evidence, and that was when the Devil came back and began suggesting even worse thoughts: "What if she does have relationships with people? What if she does have a relationship outside our marriage?"

One of the reasons these questions and thoughts kept coming was that Laila, my sister, had said something a few weeks back, something about what she knows my wife does in her spare time; that had triggered a red flag that came back to me at that particular time. I started wondering if Mariam were being unfaithful – had she cheated on me? A part of me, though, felt it was wrong to feel that way, since I had no proof.

Fighting hard to resist the thoughts, I started reciting from the Quran again. I was feeling furious, but I continued reciting from the Quran with my eyes closed and my head against the

wall. It was completely dark inside the closet, and then I suddenly decided to go outside. I opened the door to the closet and slowly walked out, left the bedroom, and headed to the living room. Everything was out of order: one couch was moved from one side to another, while the other couch was on the other end of the room.

As I walked towards my son's nursery, I realized the door to our apartment was open. I suddenly became extremely paranoid, and I immediately lunged toward the door to close it – but it wouldn't. Looking up, I discovered there were some hangers preventing me from closing the door, which sparked another fear in me that someone was outside waiting to attack me. I rushed to take down the hangers, then closed and locked the door. I began to feel a bit more safe and headed again for the nursery – but when I arrived, I noticed Mariam sleeping there, totally knocked out. The last thing I wanted to do was wake her up, mainly because I was trying to avoid a confrontation.

I started looking for my cell phone in the nursery. Everything was upside down; all my son's clothes were all over the place, and everything looked chaotic. I couldn't find my phone, so I went back to the bedroom and into the closet, feeling hopeless and miserable. Thinking I should give it all a rest, I closed my eyes and heard the LIRR rushing through in the background.

A few hours had passed, and I was starting to calm down a bit, but I was still paranoid and had no idea what was going to happen in the morning – let alone that night. The temperature inside the closet began to rise slightly, but at the same time I could feel some cool air coming in as well.

I then thought to myself, *The Jinns, devils, and angels are fighting against each other right*

*now. I can't see them, but I can feel them fighting for what's right.* This thought strengthened my faith in God as I said to myself, "God is with the right and the righteous, and He is going to help His angels and ensure they win the battle tonight."

Again, I felt a cool breeze coming in through the space at the bottom of the door, and immense heat on the left side. I had to admit at that point the whole situation was beyond my control, so I decided to let God handle it. It was dark as I closed my eyes, but when I did I suddenly saw a white light. I kept my eyes shut for a few seconds, still seeing the light, but as soon as I opened them, the light was gone and everything went dark again. At that point, I realized the fight was over and I was safe; the angels had won.

I gathered Ali in my arms and got out of the closet, which was no easy task; it was really hard getting in and out of the closet because of its tight, enclosed space. The door was about 4 feet wide and 3 feet long. Even the height was insufficient to host me; there was another platform on top of the hangers, so I couldn't even stand in there. Needless to say, it had been quite uncomfortable staying in the closet, but it felt like the safest place I could hide at the time.

The chirping of the birds was the first sound I heard as I came out of the closet with my son. It then dawned on me that it was already time for *Fajr* – predawn prayer. As I walked into the living room, I noticed my wife was already awake, sitting on the couch.

She said to me, "Adam, you need to pray *Fajr*."

"Yes, I know. I'm going to pray right now," I replied as I went to place my sleeping son carefully in the crib in his nursery.

Once Ali was settled, I walked to the faucet and started to do my ablutions – *Wadhu*. I

discovered that although I was well-versed in the process of *Wadhu*, it was taking me much longer than usual that morning to get it right. I started by washing my hands, mouth, and arms, but I skipped my nose, so I had to start again. I then realized I was doing it all in the wrong order; I just couldn't get it right. An act that usually took me about 2-3 minutes was taking me 15 minutes that morning.

Feeling anxious about this ugly development, I paused and decided to get it right. I remained focused as I went ahead to say "*Astaghfirullah*", and this time I got it right. I washed my hands three times, rinsed my mouth, and washed my nose. I also washed my face and arms three times simultaneously. I ran my hand through my hair and to the back of my neck, then back to the front, and said the *Shahadah*. I also washed my right and left feet 3 times simultaneously. Now, I was ready for prayer; I was clean.

I started praying by saying *Allah-hoo-Akbar* -- God is great. I then began reciting *Surah Fatihah*, which is the opening *Surah* of the Quran. After that, I recited another *Surah* from the Quran, then went into *Ruku* (kneeling position). I said a short prayer three times, then stood up. I repeated "*Allah-hoo-Akbar*", then went back down to the floor and put my head towards the ground, bowing my head in worship - *in Sujood*.

While doing all these, I began mixing it all up. There are two *Rakah* in the *Fajr* prayer, both involving a full set standing, kneeling and bowing down each. I was still in the first *Rakah* when I thought I was in the second. I realized I didn't do it right and had to start all over again.

The *Fajr* prayer shouldn't take longer than 5 minutes, depending on which part of the Quran is recited for the second *Surah*, but there I was, mixing it all up, forgetting words and

wasting much time. I felt guilty and ashamed. How could I not know how to do this? I'd been doing it all my life, so how could I forget it now? I gave myself a boost of confidence, reminding myself I could do it, then I started all over again – only to make the same mistakes all over again.

After spending so much time not getting it right, I decided it was getting late, so I skipped the *two Rakah Sunnah* and prayed the two obligatory prayers, *two Rakah Fardh*; even at this, I mixed up the words and had to start all over again.

At that point, I became frustrated and decided it was up to God either to accept my prayer or not. I thought to myself, *God knows I need help in my present state, and He's going to accept my prayer the way I'm offering it. Even if I'm making mistakes, God is very merciful, and it's up to Him to accept my prayer.*

So, I finished the prayer the best I could and said *Assalamualaikum Wa Rehmatullah*, looking towards my right while sitting on my knees, then looking towards my left and saying *Salam* again. Once I completed it, I felt a bit relieved, after which I got up and said my supplications. I then looked out the window and noticed it was daylight; I had been praying for over an hour, and the sun had already come up.

I headed to the living room, and Mariam was sitting on the couch when I got there. I asked her for my phone, and she brought it out to me; she had hid it in one of my jeans. It was still very early in the morning, and I told her we needed to go to my mother's house that instant.

"Adam, it's been a very long night, and you can't go outside right now," she responded.

Her response sparked more paranoia in me, and I asked why I couldn't go outside. My mind began to race; I thought maybe she had someone outside waiting for me, or maybe the

police were waiting to arrest me, somebody was going to take me, or something else bad was probably going to happen. After asking her many more times without receiving a reply, I went to lie down on the couch. I picked up my phone and dialed my mother, but she wasn't answering. I then called my sister-in-law, who was closer to where we lived. She answered the phone, and I told her all that had happened.

“I want to let you know I need help...we need to figure this out...I don't know what's going on,” I said in fragmented sentences.

“Adam, try to sleep right now. It's very early in the morning. Nothing can be done at this time. Your brother and I will come over in a little bit, and we'll see what we can do. Don't worry, everything is going to be fine. We'll figure this out,” she tried to reassure me.

I decided to take her advice and get some sleep. When I woke up about 3 hours later, I sprung from the couch in a panic upon seeing the clock just across the room; it was 9.30 am. My wife was no longer on the other couch. I went to the bedroom and nursery to look for her, but she wasn't in either room. At that point, I dialed 911.

"I need an ambulance!" I exclaimed to the operator, frantic. "I'm not feeling well, my wife's not feeling well, my son's not feeling well – *and I'm being blackmailed!*" I then asked how long it would take them to arrive.

Minutes later, as I opened the apartment door, to my surprise I saw three police officers rushing up the stairs. I hung up the phone.