

# Behind the Curtain

Original and Translation by Amal Javed Abdullah

You walk to your reticent prayer area, a small partitioned space for you, separated from the rest of the deserted fourth floor with a flimsy curtain divider. You reach into your designer Louis Vuitton bag and fish out a silky piece of blue cloth, and carefully wrap it around your head. Your Muslim identity, which is unbeknownst to the colleagues you left behind, now encompasses your entire being.

You pull out a prayer mat. Deep maroon, decorated with an intricate gold outline of the Holy House. You stand. Your soft rouged lips round in the proclamation of the greatness of your Lord. Your almond eyes, painted with black eyeliner in the shape of a meticulous wing, lower themselves in humble reverence.

You pray. Each word which you carefully mouth weighs itself heavily upon you; its meaning a quintessence of everything you long to become. You remember the mercy of your Lord, the promises of His reward and recompense, His threat of punishment. You prolong the recitation, you prolong the peace you find in this concentration.

You bow. سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ. “Glory be to My Lord, the Most Great.” You glorify, you glorify, you glorify. Then you glorify again, again, again. You continue to declare the praises of your Lord, because you realize you can never be sufficiently grateful for the bounties which He has granted you through His Glory.

You rise. سَمِعَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَهُ. “Allah has heard the one who has praised Him.” Therefore, حَمْدًا كَثِيرًا طَيِّبًا مُبَارَكًا, فيه. I praise you a praise which is “abundant, excellent and blessed.”

You prostrate. Your limbs slowly descend into *sujood* and as you surrender yourself to Him in the lowest position a human being can ever find themselves in, you say سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى, “Glory be to My Lord, the Most Elevated.” You repeat your praises and you extend your prostration, unable to tear yourself from the bliss that you find before Him. You realize your place; no matter how high you go, this is where you belong.

Slowly, you bring yourself up, and you repeat. And though you hope to elongate your prayer as long as possible, it eventually ends. You sit for a few minutes in quiet contemplation, in remembrance of Allah. Then you get up, fold your prayer mat, unpin your *hijab* and put it back in the recesses of your bag. You leave behind your quiet sanctuary, behind the divider on the deserted fourth floor of the office building, and you walk to your next business meeting with the team. They have a lot to report to you, and luckily, you have energized yourself enough to last through it.