

He lives and he learns



Illustration by Eleeza Palmer

Walking back from my meeting towards uptown,
I was running late for my prayer at sundown,
So I got on my knees and put my head to the ground.
When I rose up and looked around,
I had a feeling that something was wrong.
The red and blue were watching me as if I didn't belong.

I saw them on my tail, following from behind.
They kept looking my way thinking I was blind.
As I hurried they flashed their light,
Yelling at me to stop as the day turned to night.
They sat me down and searched through my bag.
People were staring, and it was all I could do not to gag.

Filled with embarrassment, fear, and frustration,
I knew they pulled me over due to my prostration.
I decided to ask them why.
They told me some lie, just another cliché.
"You matched a description," he claimed with what he thought
was wit.
I knew the real reason, which he'd never admit.

"I'm a student here," I told him as I reached for my ID.
"Keep your hands to your side," he yelled at me.
I remained calm and polite, acted unconcerned,
But underneath my anger was so hot it burned.
To be placed under suspicion, it truly felt disgusting.
It promoted an atmosphere of greater distrusting.

Was it because I'm Muslim, because I have a beard?
Was this any reason for me to be feared?
Why not shave my beard? Pray in private?
Well, that's not a solution.
I won't change my identity, just to preserve an illusion.
Those out there who think it's what we're choosing,
It's not so easy as that, we need a revolution.

Finally when I was done being humiliated,
I was left to walk back feeling deteriorated.
I messaged my family and friends looking for consolation.
They helped me calm down for they were my foundation.
I could've called and complained, maybe got someone fired,
But in the end I was just too tired.

I didn't want to contribute to this cycle of distrust and hate.
The only way to break it was if we could trust and relate.
When my energy came back several days later,
After I took some time to contemplate and look to my Creator,
I decided the best way to act was not to be demanding,
But to spread the knowledge and peace, and reach out with
understanding.

I can't imagine the way others may feel,
Those who have to face this frequent ordeal.
One time was enough to shake my soul.
I can only imagine how again and again it would take its toll.
Knowing in your heart what others believe,
It's not so easy to ignore without being naive.

The place where I'm from, the color of my skin,
It shouldn't be what determines who are kin.
The language I speak, the religion I follow,
It shouldn't scare my neighbors today or tomorrow.
I only ask we all acknowledge our own prejudice,
And not remain hidden behind a wall of cowardice.

It exists in us all one way or another.
It's not something we should hide or try to smother.
Expose it to yourself, pull it out into the light,
Keep it in mind, it won't be gone overnight.
It's ok if you have your concerns,
But the beauty of man is he lives and he learns.

— Abdelrahman Rahmy