

Twin Souls



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Written and Illustrated
By
Soumy A na

(Jumada 1421 - September 2000)

<http://www.ummah.com/islam/taqwapalace>



I am Soumyah. People call me
Samy. She is my sister Sophie.

We are twins, but for a long while we
did not have twin souls: we had
different faiths. I had become a
Muslim after intensive research on
religion. She worshipped the world and
what it contains, not God.
Until one day...

That day, we walked one of our daily trips towards the huge windows at the entrance of the recreational center. At the front, there was a large alley covering a few yards. This place looked like a garden. Once more, I remarked how different the plants looked to me. I particularly liked to stare at two trees that had a lighter shade of green. I always thought they were different species among those of the alley, but actually they were the same variety, maybe just older or maybe they were more exposed to the light reflected by the dark windows. The panes had somewhat whitewashed the leaves as the sun reflected on them. It was as if this alley was like Sophie and I, very similar, but very different at heart. We have never been identical twins, but someone meeting us for the first time could get confused. Or at least, that's what I thought.

So that day I was in a deep thinking mood. It seemed that I was noticing things for the first time. I was straining to remember this place. I liked to keep the memory of places in my head to enjoy them later. This way, I could carry the world within me, everywhere; the world was where I stood. I was observing how these trees had so quickly changed, becoming new kinds of plants almost overnight. Two weeks before, at the end of April, they had been all white as if frosted, their young flowers growing like pinkish-white crystals along the branches. Then they had fallen, very quickly, like snow, making the path to the center all muddy with white crimsons.

Now, green heart-sloped leaves seemed to have rapidly grown from the places the flowers had left.

Sophie's reflection, half concealed behind mine, suddenly detached itself completely in the large window. I quit my reverie. I knew she was studying her body carefully, thinking about what she had to work on for the day.



I caught her stare but avoided her eyes: it was improper for me to look at another person's shapes, even more improper to compare hers to mine. Anyway, I knew her by heart since we were kids. We were sisters, after all! Sophie was thin and elegant with a strong muscle definition, actually quite unusual for a woman. I was only slender. While she usually neatly braided her long auburn hair in delicate hairstyles, mine was scrupulously gathered behind a green veil that I always wore for sport because it was the only one that kept my curls well tamed. Each time I looked at Sophie, I could not help seeing that sadness that made her eyes look always dreamy and vulnerable. I looked straight at myself in the window and saw for a few seconds how mines were big and beaming with lights. I felt complete now as if two parts of me had been taken apart at birth then reassembled. I had jigsawed the pieces. But Sophie was still back there, and she reminded me of my past life while our reflections became one shadow as we entered the hall.

The hall of the Recreational Center, was always fresh as in a tropical greenhouse, except in winter where it seemed like a nice Foehn reaching to us as we stepped in. We often joked about the plants that were displayed around the entrance.

"Eh! Samy! You shouldn't being picking up these flowers. You might destroy somebody's thesis!"

"Not me!" I replied, releasing the petals that had fallen around the red pots, "stop your wind."



It was funny to bring back the memory of the desert wind coming up from Spain over the Pyrenean Mountains. We had lived there for many years. The Foehn turned the Pyrenean winter into spring for a few days and often brought with it the red sand of the Sahara. The decorations around the plant pots looked a little bit like purple sand dunes. She went first, passing through the gate. The attendant was checking my ID when a man came to us. It seemed as if he had waited there for sometime.

He was nonchalantly browsing through brochures and tried to look detached. When he met us, I saw that his face was shimmering with light, maybe because of his eyes and teeth. I remember noticing a lilac blur around his jaws defining the areas he had shaved. It struck me because the color was very apparent. On his chin he had a small beard that, in my opinion, gave him great maturity. He also had a good posture and held himself in dignity, betraying upon my judgment, a person of strong values and good manners. He was very thin with a tanned complexion. He looked foreign, but not quite. All his person was at the same time mysterious and intriguing. He glanced intensely at Sophie, then started:

"Wasn't that a grueling test?"

Sophie began talking about the details of the test. I had no idea what they were talking about, so I began looking around, unconcerned. At one point, I overheard something in their conversation that startled me. The man was asking my sister:

"And what about that date?"

Sophie looked straight at him for a minute, frowned, then reached into her bag. She was always carrying a huge sport bag that contained half our bathroom, from towels to lipsticks, first aid and dry fruits. She was always prepared for anything. Maybe she was always afraid to be in need of something, I mused.

"Sure", she said, pulling a date from the bag and splitting the fruit into her hands, "here you are."

The man grinned, then he looked at me strangely as if he seemed to be noticing me for the first time. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable, so I said briskly:

"You are not getting a mat?"

"No, we're cool, sis. Thanks!"

"I'll be right back."

"Great!"



While I was walking towards the front desk, she continued to carry on a few more words with him, I pondered about the strange ways sometimes Sophie had to push people away; the "date" event

was not unusual in Sophie. It was cute though.

When I came back, she dropped the bag at my feet, looking for the keys for the locker inside my jacket. Then she combed her delicate golden red locks in a bun before locking things away. She looked very detached as she declared, a little witty:

"Men are so much good looking here. It pays off to be athletic." She added over her shoulder: "Too bad they are not great lovers... Au revoir, sister".

I felt a little upset; I knew this was not she. She could be sometimes out of control, but she was not saucy. I almost cried after her: "And lucky you: they are unabashed!" I was not ready to rescue her. She had actually never been choosy as far as striking friendships was concerned. As long as she had fun... well... She never really had time to build foundations. She was like a desert plant, taking root wherever she was thrown, but soon she would withdraw for lack of water; her soul was thirsty. I think she always was disappointed in people. She expected too much too soon. Especially here, people did not let go easily and Sophie's love was so demanding! So, she would shed a tear on my shoulder, would declare: "Bah! No attachment, no worries," then headed back to the same direction over and over again. The result was that day by day sadness had deposited over her heart. The weight of that sadness dropped on the edge of her eyelashes, making them droop slightly over the iris like a quivering curtain.

I often felt sorry for her. I thought she was lonelier than the loneliest person in the world because nobody could fill up her heart completely. I had tried to explain her many a time:

"Sophie, the type of friends you have, make you what you are. Don't you think you should choose them more carefully?"

She would say: "I know," but she was drowned by a drug stronger than she was: loneliness.

What escaped her was that, meanwhile, she was exhausting her soul, the beauty of her soul. She was still like a rough diamond that did not have yet great value. But she could still choose to polish herself, make everything count. I knew she had potential. I sighed. I settled against a wall, lacing my shoes, thinking. How did I love my sister,

though! I caught a glimpse of my reflection in the windowpane. Behind, Sophie was already working out. Her long strides gave the impression that she could fly away any minute, soon out of reach. The muscles on her thighs vibrated under the impact of her walking. She had a way of casting her shoulders back while her hips rolled gently over her legs that looked very natural. I had rarely observed somebody who could walk that nicely before; most people did not know how to walk well as if walking was uncomfortable for them. A friend said hello to me. I said hello back to her, waving the tip of my fingers in the air. Most of the friends I had I had met here, here of all places where it was not easy to meet with people. Most people seemed to come here, not to have fun, but to shed a pound or two.



I was different; I enjoyed every minute of it, so it was a pleasure to me to come here and talk a bit. I think nobody expected that, but they grew into it at the end, talking to each other without knowing each other at first, encouraging each other to come back in again. I liked that a lot of, seeing people change and feel happier. I think ties are most surely built by repetitions and habits. I smiled again; this sounded just like love. This love I felt for my sister was of the same kind; it was made of tiny bits of events, none of them big. They had connected like the dewdrops of a cobweb, supported by tiny resistant threads. They grew a deep joy into my heart.

For instance, when we arrived in the US, we went to the library. The Public Library in this place is a true treasure

land. Access to knowledge, I mean any kind of knowledge, is almost ridiculously easy here, as it should be everywhere in the world.

So we met with a librarian and asked for a special audio book. She had not heard about it. Soon, she said:

"Wait a minute as I look for one of our bookworms."

Sophie looked at me in disgust: "A worm?" I looked at her, puzzled: "A book warm? Does she mean a book warming?"

To learn a new language was one thing; to use it daily was sometimes another thing.

After having filled up my water bottle, I climbed the stairway to the second story of the gym. I peered at the first person working out there, surprised. I knew this girl. She was a girl from Malaysia. I did not know she worked out. She held a book of chemistry while stair climbing. She did not seem to notice anybody. I thought about the sweat dripping on the pages, how it could damage a library book and how it could affect her posture in a bad way. I had been a sport instructor for quite a while, therefore I knew something about bad postures. But it was always hard to advise anybody. So I put it off for later.

"Peace be upon you, sister Nur Adhan," I said, walking closer to make sure she would notice me. She smiled. She always looked cute when she smiled because of her round and tiny face, and her complexion seemed suddenly enlightened from inside.

"And peace be upon you, sister
Samy."

Sister, I thought, which one was the
real one, sister from blood or sister
from faith?

"What are you doing?"

"Oh! She shrugged, I applied for a
campus job in the Chemistry's
department. I wanted to be a clerk in
the library. Well! They asked me
questions. I failed, so, I was checking
the answers."

There was something much more
important than the right answer, I
thought. I had myself my share of
mistakes. As I showed up for a clerical
job in a child's care, two years earlier, I
was asked:

"Do you have a strong conviction?
See, we are looking for people who do
not have a strong conviction."

I hesitated, then slowly declared:

"Well... I happen to have a strong conviction... ugh... I am a Muslim. I am a
religious person."

The woman laughed, but I failed the interview. I sure was not prepared for the
meeting. However, Nur was probably more fluent than I in English. As I remembered
our last meeting during one of the International University reception, I said, teasingly:

"Dig in!"

Oh god! We were asked to dig in, and she began eating with her hands! After that,
nobody wanted to "dig in" the food she had touched!

Yes, these memories were the most precious; they were the ones we shared when we
got depressed; they were the ones that made us sisters.

I quickly paced along the wall; the upstairs were vibrating each time people
were shooting in the basketball fields below. The upstairs was a little bit like a deck
with a track hanging over the main courts. Seven laps made a mile; I usually ran over
one mile for warm up, most than most people. They would usually dart past you to
stop neat after five minutes, out of breath, certain they just had had a great warm up.
Somebody said one day the young ones can do whatever they want with their bodies,
but they do not do it because they do not know how it all works. Being older, I knew a
twenty years old could beat me in speed, but not in resistance. That was my privilege
over the years. I sometimes liked the treadmills in one corner because I could think

without facing people. I began running, ever so slowly at first, thinking about my breathing, in my deep mood again. The sun reached at my feet through the huge window giving upon the entrance below. From up here, one could see everyone going in and out, except that there was another entry at the opposite side of the building. Strange how in America there is always a way to go in and a way to go out. In other countries, there is only one front door so when you get in, you maybe feel trapped. I never knew which one was the one I had to knock on when visiting, especially when people's houses had four or five doors on the outside. Like people, houses had several faces: the true face you rarely saw, and the false one. I have never thought the false face of

Americans was hypocrisy as I often heard them say. This because they made it look like politeness, a way to avoid any sort of conflict, a way to keep it cool and cozy between people. I had to learn this from them, or did I... then, at what price?

I closed my eyes, feeling the burning rays of the sun reaching on my lids moving up and down by intermittence, following each stride. Each time I did that, I could not help a sensation of floating and I could almost sense the oxygen, the nice green odor of trees, coming into me, fitting me. Those two trees that looked like different species now looked like any other tree seen from the top. *How birds must be happy*, I thought, from up there the world looked spread out, not tight, closed over itself. From over there, the crown of leaves opened up like blossoms showing another shade of green to the sun, a much deeper tone of green. That was beautiful!



Photo courtesy of: www.freeimages.co.uk



I suddenly wondered: did details like these occurred to the architects when they designed a building? I, would design a gym with alleys of trees instead of brick walls, something like a green house. The roof would be a gigantic arc with many stucco works so that birds would build their nest there and fill the building with twitterings.

The sun's rays over my skin became intense as I continued running; my hands paused on the bar to make sure I did not fall over while daydreaming. A man was looking at me from a distance. I just did not care. I knew he would be tired of staring in a minute or two. How free this feeling was. I was not the burning romantic I used to be. I giggled. I was stared at all the time because I looked different, and surely I was different. People staring or glaring at me seemed fascinated or seemed to react to a negative image they thought I represented. Nobody was really interested in figuring me out. They liked Sophie because they thought they could relate to her; they thought they could understand her. I was like the birds people watch from a distance and never think about making contact with. Sometimes I stared back, but this time these tree branches were so gorgeous, I did not care. I smiled at the pigeons that had made their home into the gutter at our feet, outside. One stared back, tossing its head defiantly to one side. I averted my gaze and watched the others as they were watching me, peacefully. I often wondered how come they never drowned when it rained, or did they?

Sophie waved a hand in my direction. I smiled. I could not help thinking how unusual her beauty was, very discreet but striking, very foreign. She was pleasant to talk to and her dreamy eyes added some kind of mystery to her personality. She had a character that fitted her appearance perfectly. I thought she wasted a lot of time and energy designing scenarios of lives she did not want to choose from. One day she would imagine herself a perfect housewife, the next day she would be the first

worldwide explorer. She lived in a fantasy world entertained in her soul by books and movies. For many years, like her, I had believed that I could stop everything anytime then start again afresh. I believed there were several lives in me, that I just had to choose between the options. I thought I could make mistakes one day and make it up later, that people would give me a second chance. I am not convinced of this anymore, and this knowledge gives me some sort of wisdom to depend upon. I watched Sophie in her leotard, how attractive to the eyes she was, and to the hearts. However, I was not certain the best way to the heart was through the eyes. I was so happy to be the opposite of her. I would look upon her with pity and she would look upon me with pity. She would say:

"You're not too hot in these clothes?"

"Well, surely not as hot as you," I joked.

"Why do you always wear these over-over sized tee-shirts that you have to fold the sleeves ten times over before one can see your hands through? And those baggy trousers look really like flat tires on you! You would look very nice in a better fitting jog suit. Let your body breathe! Free yourself!"

I smiled because she could not understand how free I felt, free of embarrassment when somebody would detail my body, judging me by my looks, not reaching for the soul! I smiled because this reminded me that one day I had been like her.

But after all, she was free to choose for herself. Who was I to judge?

She chatted now with the man we had met at the entrance of the Recreational Center. They were stretching. Sophie rested on the wall, taking poses she knew were cute. She was sticking a few hair into her mouth and pulling them out, wet, pondering. I often wondered if or not Sophie was busy questioning the reasons of her being alive, her purpose on earth, the beauty of Nature, the miracle of everything. I did not really know what was in her head, and that was normal among sisters. I just knew it was not the time for her yet to look back, or was it? She probably was at a stage in her life she only wanted to have fun. I watched her seating on the mat, near the man. They looked like strangers who wanted to reach for each other but did not dare it yet. Ten years ago, I would have been different, much closer to Sophie. I would have been ready to win the world, to reach everything I set my mind on doing. Of course, any mistake

seemed like the end of the world. Yes, growing older was growing out of all this; growing older was growing happy wings. Everything reasonable was possible now!

The Malaysian girl, Nur Adhan, appeared next to Sophie. She had again this gentle smile on her face that lighted up the entire room, or so it seemed. I was not the kind to be spying on my sister, but I liked to make sure she was ok. Besides, everything touching her touched me. So, when Nur arrived on the spot, I felt intrigued. She soon unfolded something from her backpack. Something was definitely going on there. A few words had apparently been exchanged between the three of them, but the scene seemed intense. Their faces looked like frozen leaves that had been turned over by the

wind. Their cheeks appeared slightly flushed and their eyes were beaming as if their sparks had been fed with new reflections. Now Sophie was smiling in the face of the man, and he seemed transfigured with joy.

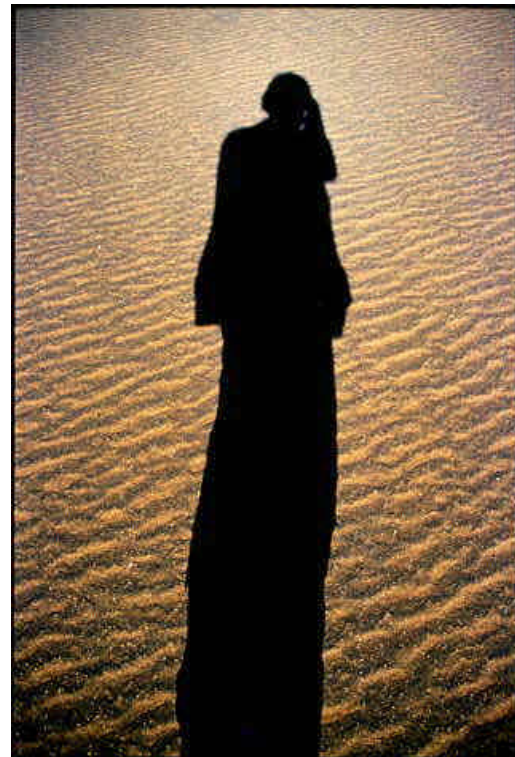


Photo courtesy of Bernhard Loersch: <http://www.tamanrasset.de>

I could not resist the temptation to join them. And, suddenly, as I approached, their bodies seemed to detach themselves from the ground; the shadows around them

were forming light pools under their knees and around their chins. They looked as if fallen down from another dimension under a jet of light coming from a window. Stars seemed to be falling over their hair as the dust continued to come and go along the beam. Nur Adhan was leaving now, exchanging graceful looks with the couple. The man, seeing me, stood up; each part of his body slowly left the luminous aura over the mats. This place smelled of old wood and wax, and the man's cologne. Sophie crossed her legs before her, holding a delicately weaved headscarf. As I paused, she gently grasped my hand and declared:

"I will be trying your way, at least for a while. See if it works for me."

I asked: "I would like to know what happened here, Sophie?"

"Well," she said, lightly twisting the silky fabric that cast sparks on the round shape of her nails. "Nur Adhan, the woman with the scarf." I nodded assent. "At first she thought I was you. Then she asked me why I was not a Muslim like you. She was very puzzled when I explained how you converted. This meeting happened a few months ago. From this day on, we began to meet after class. I liked her right away, and, well, I was curious about your religion."

I looked at her, astonished:

"You were not interested. I mean, you never asked any question, and whenever I tried to explain things to you, you just backed away. So, I have never insisted."

"I know, Samy. I think Nur Adhan always had the right answer for me. I do not recall exactly how, but what she said really made an impact on me; I thought for the first time a religion could be beautiful and logic. It made sense! She was the one who informed me that the man who was here with us was also a Muslim. He was my classmate and I liked to speak with him as well. Strange how the destiny put things together... I did not know about him at first. Actually, all this time he had hoped I was a Muslim too because he liked me. So, one day, we met, Nur Adhan and I, as usual, and she said something to me that was strong and moving and so direct I felt touched and I felt convinced."

"What was that, Sophie?" I asked gently.

"She said: *Wouldn't you like to keep your beauty only for your husband and meet a man who would never touch or look at another woman except you? Wouldn't it be*

wonderful? That man could be the one next to you.



I may have blushed, but, at the idea that this man, so handsome and intelligent, was not a player... Can you imagine? He has never had a girlfriend?"

She looked quickly around, checking if anybody was eavesdropping, a little embarrassed. But the place was almost empty, and she was anyway too excited to pay much attention to her surroundings.

"Yes, it's quite amazing, is it not?" I confirmed, happy.

"He said he was going to marry me."

"Like that?"

"Yes, like that! I believed him."

"Are you thrilled?"

"Yes! I believe I am."

I let a tear get prisoner between my eyelids, a tear of overwhelming feelings. Sophie put her arm around my shoulders. She looked different; her eyelids were opened completely, just enough to welcome a ray of the sun. Her dark eyes became semi-translucent as the green shades around the iris began to reveal themselves. The range of squares reflecting from the upper windows seemed to embrace the white of her gaze. I had never seen her so transfigured, so radiant. Then I recognized that she had been expecting that all along without really believing in it.

I stirred, lifting the brim of Sophie's cap she had dropped on the floor, and played with it. Then, I added:

"Do you know what the name Nur Adhan means?"

"Nur Adhan? No?"

"Nur Adhan means "the light of the call for prayer"."

"Really?" she said admiringly.

"Yup. Amazing how names sometimes fit people."

She nodded silently, then stopped talking for a long while. I was also thinking on my own. At the end, she pulled herself up and tried a joke:

"I guess, once your clothes are damp after exercising for a while, you may feel cool again."

We exchanged smiles.

"Indeed."

I stretched my arm to make her feel the cotton material that was now fresh all over me. The shades under her eyelids gave me a glimpse for a second or two of my face, white and small like a pinhead enveloped into shadows. And

I thought for an instant that she probably also had seen her reflection into my eyes, our twin eyes. The pool of light seemed to have migrated there. The trees outside suddenly waved into our irises, over our twin souls. We watched them, and they watched us, silently, peacefully.