

A woman wearing a patterned headscarf and a dark blue garment is sitting on a large rock in a forest. The background is filled with trees with yellow and orange leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

# *A Voice*

A NOVEL

*Book Two in If I Should Speak trilogy*

*Special Edition*

Umm Zakiyyah

# *A Voice*

the sequel to

*If I Should Speak*

A Novel



## Umm Zakiyyah



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PUBLICATIONS

**A Voice**  
The Sequel to *If I Should Speak*  
A Novel  
By Umm Zakiyyah

Book Two in *If I Should Speak* trilogy  
**Special Edition**

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## *Preface to Special Edition*

Dear reader,

As you know, *A Voice* is the sequel to my first book *If I Should Speak*, and it is Book 2 in the trilogy. However, at the time that I released *If I Should Speak* in 2001, I had no idea that there would be a sequel, let alone a trilogy. When readers would ask me if there'd be another story to follow *If I Should Speak*, I'd say I didn't know. There was just so much to consider at that time, and I was still learning about the world of writing and publishing. Moreover, I was still exploring the literary genre that I had unknowingly helped pioneer: Islamic fiction.

I knew I didn't want to just write a story for the sake of writing a story. Though I loved reading, I myself was finding it difficult to enjoy novels that seemed to have no value except an entertaining read. I didn't want that for my book. I wanted the story I wrote to be meaningful too. It needed a "soul." It would take a couple of years before I found that meaning in a story idea that ultimately became the book *A Voice*.

I've always been moved by the stories of those who have made the life-altering decision to accept Islam and live upon a spiritual path different from their parents and family. I'd find this choice so moving because I could only imagine how challenging their path must be, and how deeply rooted and personally meaningful their faith.

As it so happens, I wouldn't have to imagine their path for long. I ended up living part of it myself. Though I am still finding the words to give voice to my own spiritual journey, there is so much that I can personally relate to in the stories of converts to Islam who lost family and loved ones due to putting their souls above all else. When people ask me how I can understand the path of converts to Islam and portray them so accurately in my fictional books, I know in my heart it's because their path is not fiction to me. The facts and details of their lives might be different from mine, but the emotional and spiritual trials are very similar.

Regarding including these stories in my novels themselves, as I often say in my writing workshops: Fiction is where you can tell the truth without worrying about the facts. And on many levels, the story *A Voice* represents that fictional truth-telling for me.

I pray you find a piece of your own truth and personal journey somewhere between the lines.

Sincerely,

Umm Zakiyyah



## **Dedication**

For those who have submitted and  
those who have not, but will.



## ❧ Six ❧

When Tamika tired of running, she tried to catch her breath. She leaned forward hugging her purse and breathed in and out like she had been taught when she had run track. Her breathing was painful, and she wondered if she had asthma. She noticed her torn dress and realized her tattered appearance. She would draw a lot of attention if she didn't go somewhere soon. She glanced around and guessed that she was about a mile from home. She stared ahead of her. What should she do? A phone booth stood outside of a grocery store in a plaza ahead. She immediately headed toward it.

Inside the booth, her hands shook as she dialed the operator and told her she needed to make a collect call. She hated to disturb Aminah and her family, but she didn't know what else to do. She pulled out the address book from her purse and flipped to the page that had Aminah's information on it. She then recited the number to the operator and waited to be prompted to say her name. She silently prayed they were home. When a woman's voice said, "Yes," and accepted the call, she whispered thanks to Allah. Her tears had dried, but she still felt overwhelmed and confused. The entire situation was shocking, but she shouldn't have been surprised. Her mother had a short temper when things didn't go her way. Tamika had seen Latonya treated similarly after their mother learned she was pregnant.

"Tamika?" Aminah's voice was a whisper, but her deep concern was apparent.

The soft, caring voice made Tamika weaken, and she felt a lump developing in her throat. She wished so badly that Aminah was next to her right then. She needed a hug. "Yes. It's me."

"Are you alright?" Too overcome with concern, Aminah forgot the Islamic greeting.

"I'm fine," Tamika lied, about to break down. "I'm sorry to call collect." She drew in a deep breath and exhaled, resisting the urge to cry. "I just—."

"Where are you?"

Tears welled in her eyes, and she blinked to stop them. "In a phone booth."

"You're not home?"

"My mom kicked me out." Her voice cracked and became a whine in her last breath. Unable to withhold any longer, tears spilled from her eyes, and she began to sob into the phone. She mentally kicked herself for being so weak.

"Okay," Aminah said, taking a deep breath, "tell me what's going on." Aminah sat on her brother's bed, where she had been listening to him

practice his speech. Sulayman stood a few feet from her, now distracted by the words his sister was speaking into the phone. He knew she was talking to Tamika. He had heard Aminah say her roommate's name. He watched with intent concern as Aminah lowered her head and shook it as she listened, clearly disturbed by what she was hearing. He saw her face grow pink and her eyes water, and he knew something was terribly wrong.

"Okay," Aminah said, still shaking her head in disbelief. She was silent for a few minutes then sighed and looked toward Sulayman, her eyes telling him that her friend was in trouble. "Tamika, is there a phonebook in the booth?"

Tamika glanced around the booth and spotted one attached to a thick wire. "Yes." She sniffed.

"Can you look up a hotel for me? Anything that's close to where you are now."

"I think there's a, um," she sniffed, wiping her tears with one hand, "a, um, hotel a few miles down the street."

"Is that the closest one?"

"I think so."

Aminah took a deep breath. "Okay, then, find the number."

"I, um, don't have enough money to stay there."

"Tamika, listen to me," she said as Sulayman stared at her intently. His face became flushed with worry. "Don't worry about that. Just give me the number, and do exactly what I say, okay?"

"Okay."

"After you give me the number, I want you to hang up and start walking to the hotel. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes."

"When you get to the hotel, I want you to give me a call on the nearest payphone. Try to make yourself as presentable as possible, because I don't want them to turn you away."

"But my dress is ripped," Tamika whined as tears streamed down her face.

Aminah sighed, shaking her head and trying to think what to do. "Okay, um, then can you cover it up somehow?"

Tamika tried to think as the tears flooded her vision. She wiped her face and looked down at the rip.

"Can you tie a knot to hide it?"

Tamika studied the tear and decided she could, although it would appear a bit awkward. "I think so."

"Okay, then, do that." Aminah paused to take a deep breath. "Do you have something to cover your hair?"

"No, everything's at the house."

Aminah sighed. "If you don't have a comb, just run your fingers through it until you think you look okay. But before you go in the hotel,

find a restaurant bathroom or something where you can see how you look. And Tamika?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t think of anything right now except that Allah is there for you, okay?”

“Okay.” Tamika nodded through tears.

“It’s fine to cry, but try to fight it for now, until we can get you a room.”

She cried more. “Okay.”

“Remember, as you walk, just think about Allah and nothing else, okay?”

“Okay.”

“And don’t stop to talk to anyone. You can’t trust anybody, especially at night. If anybody wants directions or something, play deaf, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Tie your dress, and smooth down your hair so people don’t call the police, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Now, remember, call me before you go in the hotel, even if it’s from a nearby gas station. *InshaAllaah*, I’m going to have your room number and everything then, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Can you repeat what I want you to do?”

Worried, Sulayman watched his sister. He could only imagine what was going on. As the possibilities filled his head, he grew angry, fearing the worst.

“Good,” Aminah said into the phone with a nod. “Yes, exactly. So I’m going to wait for your call. If I don’t hear from you in an hour, I’m gonna send the police to look for you, okay?”

Tears still in her eyes, Tamika laughed beside herself. “Okay.”

“I’m not playing,” Aminah warned good-naturedly, but that she was serious was clear.

“I know.”

“One hour, no more. Walk quickly.”

“Okay.”

“Now, what’s the number?”

Tamika flipped to the hotel listing and found the hotel she was looking for and recited the number to Aminah, who repeated it for clarity.

“Now don’t forget what to do.”

“I won’t.”

“*InshaAllaah*,” Aminah said more for herself than Tamika.

“*InshaAllaah*,” Tamika repeated, relaxing now that she had some hope.

“*As-salaamu-‘alaikum*.”

“*Wa ‘alaiku-mus-salaam*.”

“What?” Sulayman demanded, dreading what he was about to hear.

Aminah rubbed her hands over her face and sighed. She shook her head as she wondered where to begin.

“What?” His voice rose in insistence.

“She’s um—.”

“Was it a man?” Anger swept through his body in a rage, ready to sacrifice his graduation and speech if he had to, to go break the criminal’s neck.

“No, no, no.” Aminah shook her head, allowing him to calm a bit. “Her mother kicked her out of the house after she found out she became Muslim.”

Sulayman exhaled in relief, but he was still concerned.

“Apparently, her mother got really violent, so Tamika’s on the street right now, and she called collect from a payphone.” She sighed again. “She doesn’t know what to do.”

“What are you waiting for then? Get on the phone and reserve her room.”

As his sister dialed, Sulayman folded his arms and bit his lower lip in deep thought, forgetting about his speech just then. He hoped Tamika was all right. He hated the helplessness he felt whenever something like this happened to a Muslim woman. It was frustrating. He had feared something like this would happen to Tamika. When his sister told him earlier that day that Tamika’s mother didn’t know that she was Muslim, he became worried. He thought of how Tamika had been moved to tears when they prayed early that morning, and he wondered at the immense faith that her mother was sure to crush. It pained him to think of a faith so pure being tainted by the selfishness of one woman. But it was possible that Tamika’s mother was different, he had considered. But now he knew better.

To Aminah’s relief, the hotel had several rooms available for the night. With her Visa card from her parents’ account, she reserved a room for Tamika through Sunday night. After she hung up the phone, she sighed and looked to her brother, hoping Tamika would make it to the hotel safely.

“They may not let her stay because the card’s not in her name,” Sulayman said, voicing what they both feared.

“Well, we’ll just have to pray on this one because I don’t know what else to do.”

“We could wire her the money.”

“Yeah, but then she won’t be able to get it until tomorrow,” Aminah said. “And even if she could get it tonight, do you really want her roaming the city looking for the place to pick it up?”

Sulayman nodded in agreement as he tried to think of something else.

“I told them Tamika will be staying in the room, so let’s just pray that the receptionist hasn’t worked at the hotel long enough to know to ask for the credit card.”

“We may have to go and get her.”

“Go get her?” Aminah stared at her brother in amazement.

“She can’t live in a hotel for the rest of the summer.”

“Yeah, but how would we get her?”

“We can drive up there.”

Aminah studied her brother curiously with her eyebrows gathered and felt sorry for him just then. She rarely saw him this concerned. Sulayman had a big heart, but he had never been one for a long drive. The longest distance he had ever driven was five hours, and getting him to do that was like pulling teeth. Their father and mother usually did the driving for long road trips, even if Sulayman was in the car. He was being irrational. “But your graduation is tomorrow. And then Monday, *Abee*<sup>20</sup> has to work.”

“Maybe we should book her a flight.”

“Yeah,” Aminah said, doubt traceable in her voice, “but flights at such late notice are really expensive, especially from Wisconsin.”

He nodded as his mind searched for alternatives. “That’s true.” He rubbed his forehead. “Does she have any other family in the city?”

“If she did, I’m sure she would’ve called them instead of us,” Aminah said, scratching a spot on her arm. “Anyway, even if she did, that’s probably not the wisest thing to do right now. We don’t know if they would welcome her any more than her mother. I don’t get the impression that her family is ‘open arms’ when it comes to religious differences.”

“Maybe she has a friend she can stay with for a bit.”

“Yeah, but they wouldn’t be Muslim. The last thing she needs right now is to be taken in by someone who’ll put a roof over her head but discourage her in her Islam.” She chuckled and shook her head. “And I know the girl who was her best friend at Streamsedale, and if her friends are anything like that, then you can forget about her Islam.”

“What happened to family values?” Sulayman’s eyes narrowed as he shoved his hands into the pockets of his slacks and walked over to the window. He was growing frustrated with the same scenario each time a person became Muslim.

Aminah laughed from where she sat and smoothed a wrinkle in Sulayman’s comforter. “Today, family doesn’t mean much to people, especially in this country. They’d disown their children if they didn’t major in what they wanted them to.” She shook her head. “And that’s just college. You can imagine what happens when the issue is religion.”

“The Muslim community needs to set up something so new Muslims don’t have to go through this each time,” Sulayman said, turning away from the window and walking over to his desk, where he sat on its edge and crossed his arms.

“There are Muslim shelters,” Aminah offered with a shrug.

“But we can’t in good conscience put our sisters in a place we wouldn’t live ourselves.”

“But as the story goes, those who can help the most are the ones count-

ing their pennies and swearing they don't have enough."

"Maybe that's the problem," Sulayman said, lifting a hand to rub his beard. "We wait for the rich Muslims to take care of all our problems. If people with even an average income worked together, we could do a lot."

"True."

The room grew silent as Sulayman continued to rub his beard and stare distantly above his sister's head toward a framed certificate hanging on the wall next to his bed.

"So you want to go back to campus tonight?" Aminah asked a few minutes later, standing as she pulled her hair back and started to braid it with her head tilted to one side.

Sulayman shrugged as he reached to pick up a pencil that was about to fall from his desk and placed it on top of a book. "Let's just see what Dad says."

Tamika was reciting silent prayers to Allah and trying to stay focused as she walked, but her legs ached. She had made a knot at the side of her dress to make herself look presentable, but she doubted the look suited her at all. Her skirt was visible below the knot, and she had no idea how her hair looked. But she had run her fingers through it like Aminah had suggested. She walked as quickly as she could, knowing the hotel was a bit far on foot. She kept her eyes fixed ahead of her. She wouldn't even glance at anyone who passed. Alone on the street at night, she was terrified. Although she had walked at night many times before, tonight she felt helpless and wanted nothing more than shelter.

The wind ripped through her thin blazer, sending chills through her body. She slipped her hands into the jacket's pockets and began to count her steps to the hotel. She prayed that Allah would make it easy for her. She held onto the knowledge that He was there, which was all she could think of to keep her mind from drifting back to her mother and the horrible fight.

When Tamika thought she could walk no longer, she saw the sign for the hotel glowing in the distance. She whispered thanks to Allah. She kept moving, trying to quicken her steps. She wanted desperately to be in warmth. She felt her breaths becoming painful again, and her side began to cramp. But she pushed herself to keep going. She was almost there.

When the hotel was just ahead, she praised God again and again in her head. She was about to head toward the entrance when she remembered what Aminah had said. She glanced about her and saw a restaurant across the street. She looked both ways before walking quickly across the main street until she was in front of the restaurant. She took a deep breath and exhaled before entering and heading to the restroom.

She looked in the mirror and was repulsed by her appearance. Her hair

was disheveled despite her attempts to smooth it down. There was a large red welt on her face, and her bottom lip was slightly swollen. She felt the urge to break down, but she held back, remembering that she had to appear respectable or the hotel may turn her away. She opened her purse and tried to find a comb, but there was none. Not knowing what else to do, she closed her purse and turned on the faucet. It wasn't the wisest thing to do on a cool night, but she had no other choice. She held her hands under the water and let it run through her fingers. With her wet hands, she wiped over her hair until it appeared neat. She found some lip-gloss and foundation in a small zipper pocket of her purse and frowned at their tattered state. She sighed and spread the gloss across her lips and used the foundation to cover the red mark. She studied her reflection. She looked a little better. But she would have to tuck her bottom lip to conceal the swelling.

She drew in a deep breath before leaving the restaurant to look for a payphone. She didn't see one, but there was a gas station next to the restaurant. She made her way there, and she saw a payphone near the bathrooms in the back. She hurried to it to make a collect call to Aminah.

*"Alhamdulillah,"* Aminah praised God for allowing Tamika to arrive safely.

"Were you able to get a room?" Tamika asked, glancing about her in the night. No one seemed to notice her.

"I reserved it and told them you would be the guest, but here's the thing," Aminah said. "If they demand to see me in person with the credit card, pretend like this was already arranged ahead of time. You can't let them turn you away."

"You think they will?" Tamika was terrified at the thought. She had nowhere else to go.

"No," Aminah assured, praying she was correct. "They shouldn't, but do that just in case, okay?"

"Okay."

"The room is three eighteen, and it's under Aminah Ali, but I told them the guest will be you, Tamika Douglass. Got it?"

"Got it."

"Call me once you get to the room, okay?"

"Okay."

"Allah's taking care of you, Tamika, so don't worry about anything."

She blinked to fight the tears. "Okay."

"I'm waiting to hear from you in the next twenty minutes."

"Okay."

*"As-salaamu-'alaikum."*

*"Wa-'alaiku-mus-salaam."*

Aminah hung up the phone and sighed, turning to her parents and brother, who all sat in the living room with concerned expressions on their

faces. Sarah and Ismael sat next to each other on the couch under the window, and their son sat on the floor across from them, his back leaning against the wall. Aminah walked back over to the love seat where she had been sitting before Tamika called.

"I think the only thing we can do is rent a car and get the sister," Ismael said after Aminah sat down. "I just don't think it's wise for us to leave her up there."

"But you work," Sarah reminded him.

"I can drive up there with Aminah tomorrow afternoon," Sulayman offered.

Sarah looked to her husband doubtfully. "How long is the drive?"

Ismael rubbed a hand over his face as he tried to gather his thoughts. "About thirteen hours."

"Isn't that too long for you?" Sarah's expression grew concerned as she turned to her son.

"I can rest after six hours."

"I could do it," Ismael said tentatively, "but I would be cutting it close. I'd definitely need to sleep for a bit before getting back on the road."

"If you left around six o'clock in the afternoon tomorrow," Sarah estimated, "you could get there early Sunday morning, of course, assuming you take no break. But if you rest more than a few hours before coming back, you may not be able to get home by Sunday night and rest before work."

Ismael drew in a deep breath. "It would be pushing it, but I could give it a try. But tomorrow's such a full day, I doubt I'd be able to get out of here by six. And then there's rush hour, which would push us to leave seven at the earliest."

"You could skip my graduation," Sulayman said from where he sat.

"No, no, no," his father said, shaking his head. He creased his forehead as he studied his son with concern. "I'm not going to do that. I'd fly her in before I miss your speech."

"Remember, some of my family is coming in for the ceremony," Sarah reminded them, remembering herself just then. "We can't cut their visit short by jumping on the road."

Ismael frowned and nodded. "You're right." He turned to his wife. "How long are they staying?"

"There's no telling, but I'm pretty sure my mother will stay the weekend."

"Sulayman will just have to drive out Sunday or Monday after everyone leaves."

Sarah's eyes narrowed in concern as she looked at her husband, apparently taken aback by his suggestion.

"He's a man," Ismael reminded her with finality, but a trace of concern was in his voice. "He knows what to do."

“But it’s such a long distance, sweetheart. We can’t put him on the road alone.”

“Aminah will be with him.”

She almost laughed. Her husband couldn’t be serious. “But she’ll probably sleep.”

“Sweetheart, this is a time we just have to trust in Allah.”

Sarah grew silent at the reminder and stopped herself from saying more. She nodded in reluctant agreement then gazed at her son, who sat quietly listening to the exchange. His gaze was down, and his expression was hard to read. But she could tell he was determined to help in any way he could. He wanted so desperately for his parents to see him as a man, but it was difficult for Sarah to see him as anything but a child. Underneath the beard and towering height, he was still Sulayman, her baby, her firstborn. But she had to let go. It hurt to admit it, but he was a man now, and she would only handicap him by holding him back. She sighed thoughtfully and looked to her husband. “You’re right.”

“Everything’s already paid for,” Tamika told the receptionist, silently praying he wouldn’t give her any trouble.

“We need to see the credit card that was used to book the room.”

“Can I speak to the manager?”

“He’s gone for the day.”

She feigned impatience. “Sir, I traveled a long distance, and was told everything was taken care of. Do I have to take my business elsewhere?”

The receptionist looked uncertain, but Tamika’s eyes told him she meant business and wasn’t going to take no for an answer. Finally, he shrugged. “We usually don’t do this, but,” he sighed, locating the key and handing it to her, “it’s room three eighteen.”

She silently thanked God and tried to resist the urge to run to the room. She took the stairs two at a time, opting to avoid the elevator, fearing a delayed presence in the lobby would make the receptionist change his mind.

In the room, she called Aminah.

“*Alhamdulillah!*” Aminah exclaimed, exhaling in relief and smiling at her family after hanging up the phone. “She checked in.” She prostrated in gratefulness to her Lord then stood. “Well, at least she has a place to sleep for the weekend. But Monday morning, we’ll either have to do another day or be there to pick her up.”

“As long as we get there before sunset on Monday, she can go to a mall or something nearby until we arrive,” Sulayman said, impressing his mother with his mature words. Maybe he could handle the drive after all.

“I don’t think Grandma will stay that long,” Aminah said. “She usually only stays for a few hours.”

Sarah nodded. “That’s true. But we should plan on her leaving late Sunday just in case.”

“Who else is coming?” Ismael asked.

“Kate and Justin may come,” Sarah said referring to her brother and sister, “but I’m not sure. If they do, they’ll likely leave Saturday night. They don’t like to hang around long.”

No one responded, knowing what she meant.

Ever since Sarah became Muslim, her family had distanced themselves from her. Most times, it was a polite distance, but their displeasure with her religious choice was clear. Sarah had come from a middle class White American household, and her decision to accept Islam had come as a shock to her parents and siblings. She was the middle child, with her brother three years older and her sister two years younger. Sarah’s home had been only moderately religious. As a teenager, she rejected the church completely and considered herself an atheist. Her parents were professed Christians, but they frequently made fun of organized religion, so it was difficult to tell what they really believed.

Sarah’s brother was now a lawyer, and her sister was a news anchor for a local station in her city. They all thought Sarah was crazy for giving up her medical practice to stay home and raise children. Ismael was an engineer, but his salary was barely half of what hers had been as a doctor. When she married him and became Muslim, she had two things against her. She was Muslim, and she was married to a Black man—it made no difference to them that Ismael’s mother was White. That was the last time she knew how it felt to be a part of a family. After Sarah’s parents divorced, her mother made efforts to be a part of her grandchildren’s lives, but the relationship was strained. This was apparent to everyone.

Ismael, on the other hand, was an only child whose parents didn’t care as much when he accepted Islam. His father and grandparents disagreed with his choice and argued with him occasionally, but their general sentiment was that Ismael had to do what he felt was right for him. Ismael’s parents divorced when he was in middle school, and he was raised mostly by his paternal grandparents, who died when he was in college. He never knew his maternal grandparents because his mother had been disowned for marrying a Black man. He rarely saw his mother after the divorce, and he later learned that she was trying to reestablish a relationship with her parents, who likely had no idea of his existence. His father had tried to be a part of his life, but he was on the road a lot trying to make ends meet. He died of a heart attack a few years after Ismael and Sarah married. The last thing Ismael heard about his mother was that she was in a nursing home and barely remembered her own name.

“We can just rent a car for Sulayman and Aminah,” Ismael said, changing the subject. “And we can give them one of our cell phones.”

Sarah nodded. The idea of them driving a reliable car and carrying a

cell phone made her feel better about the journey. Part of her wanted to ride with them, but she knew Ismael would think she was being overprotective. He often told her that Sulayman needed to do things on his own and that he shouldn't depend on his mother too much.

"We'll be fine, *inshaAllaah*," Sulayman said, sensing his mother's apprehension.

She forced a smile and nodded. She could only pray he was right.

In the hotel room, Tamika sat on the bed and reflected on her predicament. She had no idea what she was going to do after tonight. But she was thankful that she had a place to sleep, even if only for a night. Aminah would probably let her stay in the room for the weekend, but where would she go after that? Her mind raced with names. Who would let her stay with them for the summer? Her flight back to Atlanta wasn't until mid-August, and she would definitely need a place until then.

She could call her aunt. It would take some convincing, but Jackie wouldn't let Tamika sleep on the street. But could Tamika live with Raymond? Maybe she could find a summer job and earn enough to pay for an apartment for a few months. She could put in an application at all the stores in the mall and pray something came through. But could a summer job pay her enough to rent an apartment? Most complexes had minimum income requirements, and even those that didn't required some sort of government voucher.

The sound of the phone ringing startled Tamika, and for a moment she considered not answering it. But it could be Aminah. She hoped the plans hadn't changed.

"Hello?"

"*As-salaamu-'alaikum*."

"Is everything okay?" Tamika asked after returning the greetings.

"Yes, everything's fine," Aminah said. "I just wanted to call back to see if you knew anybody you could stay with for the summer."

Tamika sighed. "I'm trying to think of people right now."

"You don't have any other family in the city?"

"My aunt's here. But my cousins are there, and I don't know how that'll work out."

"There's no space?"

"There's space," Tamika said hesitantly. She didn't want to tell Aminah about Raymond. "But it'd be almost impossible to live there and be a Muslim at the same time."

"There's no one else?"

"My brother and sister, but I have no idea where they are."

There was a brief pause before Aminah said, "I see."

Tamika didn't want to stress Aminah's family. She already felt bad for all they had done. "Don't worry about it. I'll think of something before my

flight back in August.”

Just then an idea came to Aminah. She could have kicked herself for not thinking of it before. Why should her family drive to Milwaukee when Tamika already had a return ticket to Atlanta? “But what will you do until then?”

“I don’t know.” Tamika didn’t want to think about it right then.

“Can’t you change your flight to come back earlier?”

Hmm. She hadn’t thought of that, most likely because she had no family in Atlanta. “I suppose I could, but the flight is booked on my mother’s credit card.”

Aminah grew silent momentarily. “But it’s in your name, right?”

“The ticket is, but the credit card isn’t. I think my mother has to call to change it.” Tamika had bought the ticket herself with her mother’s permission, but she doubted she could do that again.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think you can be your mother for a few minutes?”

At first Tamika didn’t understand what Aminah meant, but a second later, she caught on. “I suppose.” She paused then added skeptically, “But the university apartments are closed during the summer, at least they are for the undergraduates. So I don’t know where I would stay.”

“You can stay with us.”

“No,” Tamika said so quickly that a moment later she hoped she hadn’t offended Aminah. But they had done too much already. She wouldn’t dream of burdening them by living in their house. “I wouldn’t feel right.”

“But then where will you go?”

Tamika grew silent as her gaze fell on the keypad of the phone then on the hotel information card next to it. Where would she go?

“Tamika,” Aminah said before Tamika could respond, “trust me, it’s not a problem. We’d love to have you.”

“But, Aminah, I wouldn’t feel right. I’d feel like I’m imposing on your family.”

“You are my family.”

Tamika’s heart drummed at the soothing words, and she felt herself getting choked up again. If only her mother felt the same.

“Just change your flight and let us know what time you’ll be coming in.”

Tamika picked up a blue hotel pen and toyed with it as her gaze fell on the mirror on the desk in a corner of the room. “I can’t.”

“Why not?”

Tamika shook her head, the capped pen’s tip now in her mouth. She wished Aminah could understand. “I’m sorry, Aminah,” she said, setting the pen back on the nightstand. “I just can’t. I appreciate everything you’re trying to do, but I really can’t.”

“But—.”

“I wouldn’t feel right,” Tamika cut in, feeling the swelling on her face with her palm. It seemed to have gone down some. “And plus, it’s not my money. My mom’s already struggling to pay the bills, and it was really hard for her to pay for this flight.”

“We can pay the difference.”

Tamika sighed, her hand falling to her lap. “How Aminah?” She was trying to make her roommate understand. “My mother doesn’t accept handouts, especially to make up for what she sees as stabbing her in the back. You couldn’t pay her enough to use her card behind her back. Anyway, if my mother sees a charge on her card after what happened tonight, I’ll probably never be able to come back home.”

Aminah was silent for a moment. “I see what you’re saying.”

“I’m sorry,” Tamika said, feeling bad for Aminah and her family. She knew they only wanted to help.

“You’re sure she wouldn’t just let you leave early?”

Tamika forced laughter. “Aminah, I wouldn’t be surprised if she called the airline and cancelled the ticket altogether or changed her credit card number.”

“You think she’d do that?”

“You don’t know my mother. When she says get out, she means it. And that doesn’t just mean get out of the house. It means get out of her life.”

There was a brief pause. “We could buy you a bus ticket.”

“No, Aminah. I’ll be fine. I’ll just start applying for jobs and see what happens.”

“But what will you do in the meantime?”

“If nothing else comes up, I’ll call my aunt.”

“What if she doesn’t let you stay?”

Tamika sighed. “I don’t know. But I don’t think she’ll let me go homeless.”

“Does she know you’re Muslim?”

Tamika’s gaze fell on the buttons of her dress, and she noticed that two were missing, exposing some of her undershirt. She put her fingers in the open space and scratched her stomach. What if Thelma hadn’t told her sister? What if she had? Would Jackie turn her away too?

“I don’t know,” Tamika said finally, feeling the buttons under her neck to make sure they were there.

“You shouldn’t stay there then.”

She bit her lower lip and wrapped the phone cord around a finger. Maybe Aminah was right. “I’ll be fine, *inshaAllaah*,” Tamika said, betraying her true thoughts.

“Tamika, at least let us buy you a bus ticket down here.”

“Aminah, no,” Tamika said, releasing her finger from the cord. “I couldn’t. I’d go back to my mother before I let you do that.”

“Tamika, it’s not a big deal. We could do it.”

Tamika sighed and shook her head though she knew Aminah couldn’t see her. “I know, but I just wouldn’t feel right.”

“But what will you do?”

“Aminah, please don’t worry about it, really.”

Aminah took a deep breath and exhaled. “Okay, then. I booked the room through Sunday night, so just give me a call Monday to let me know what you’re going to do, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Take care, Tamika. You’re in our prayers.”

“Tell your family thanks so much.”

“I will, *inshaAllaah*.”

“*As-salaamu-‘alaikum*.”

“*Wa-‘alaiku-mus-salaam*.”

“I guess this means we’ll be going to get her after all,” Sulayman said, rubbing a side of his face after his sister hung up. He and his parents were still in the living room and had been listening to Aminah talk to Tamika.

“I guess so.” Aminah sighed and scratched her head, walking over to the love seat and standing next to it to face her family. “But we’ll have to make sure we get up there before she checks out on Monday morning.”

“We may have to leave Sunday morning first thing,” Sulayman said, turning to his parents for approval, “even if Grandma is still here.”

Ismael nodded as he listened and looked at his wife, who sat on the couch next to him with a distant look of worry on her face. He placed his hand on hers and patted it gently, and Sarah glanced at him with a forced smile. “I think that’ll be fine *inshaAllaah*,” he said. “Otherwise, the sister’ll be roaming the streets, and we’ll probably never know where she is.”

“And I doubt she’s gonna call again,” Aminah said, sitting on an arm of the love seat and crossing her arms under her chest. “She sounds like she wants to weather this on her own.”

Ismael drew in a deep breath and exhaled. “I doubt she wants to take this on alone,” he said. “But she doesn’t think she has a choice. Nobody wants to feel like they’re disrupting someone else’s life with their own.”

“But I told her it’s not a problem,” Aminah said, shaking her head in dismay.

Ismael chuckled and squeezed the hand of his wife, who he could tell was growing more concerned about her own children’s safety as the reality of everything set in. “She has no reason to believe that. That’s what everyone says in situations like this.”

Aminah’s eyes widened as she looked at her father. “But we wouldn’t lie to her.”

He chuckled again. “Sweetheart, she doesn’t think we’re lying. It’s just

that people usually offer more than they realize they can give.”

Aminah nibbled at her lower lip and scratched at a small bump on her chin with her thumb.

“But now I think you two should be heading back to the university,” Ismael said, wanting to talk to his wife. “We have a big day tomorrow.”

Sulayman sighed and stood. “You ready to go?” he asked Aminah as he started for the door.

Aminah forced a smile and followed suit, exhausted from the discussion. “I suppose.”

“Then let’s go before I get too tired to drive home.”



## About the Author

Umm Zakiyyah is the bestselling author of more than twenty books, including the novels *If I Should Speak* trilogy, *Muslim Girl*, and *His Other Wife*; and the self-help books *Reverencing the Wombs That Broke You*, *Prejudice Bones in My Body*, and *The Abuse of Forgiveness*. Her novel *His Other Wife* is now a short film.

She writes about the interfaith struggles of Muslims and Christians and the intercultural, spiritual, and moral struggles of Muslims in America. Her work has earned praise from writers, professors, and filmmakers and has been translated into multiple languages.

Umm Zakiyyah recently founded UZ University, where she teaches online courses to aspiring and struggling writers at **uzuniversity.com**.

To find out more about the author, visit her website at **uzauthor.com** or connect with her online:

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# **Books By Umm Zakiyyah**

## **Fiction**

*If I Should Speak (Book 1 in trilogy)*

*A Voice (Book 2 in trilogy)*

*Footsteps (Book 3 in trilogy)*

*Realities of Submission*

*Hearts We Lost*

*The Friendship Promise*

*Muslim Girl*

*His Other Wife*

*UZ Short Story Collection*

*The Test Paper (a children's book)*

## **Non-Fiction**

*Pain. From the Journal of Umm Zakiyyah*

*Broken yet Faithful. From the Journal of Umm Zakiyyah  
(Adult Coloring Book)*

*Faith. From the Journal of Umm Zakiyyah*

*Let's Talk About Sex and Muslim Love: Essays on Intimacy  
and Romantic Relationships in Islam*

*Reverencing the Wombs That Broke You: A Daughter of  
Rape and Abuse Inspires Healing and Healthy Family*

*And Then I Gave Up: Essays About Faith and Spiritual  
Crisis in Islam*

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*even if.*

*souls.*

*No One Taught Me the Human Side of Islam: The Muslim  
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*Prejudice Bones in My Body: Essays on Muslim Racism,  
Bigotry and Spiritual Abuse*