

Dear Father,

They took you away almost a year ago today, but the pain of your absence is as sharp now as it was the first night without your supporting hand. Mom still cries, but she has lately concealed her tears of sorrow, so as not to frighten to twins. I fear for her well being, and hope that the pain dulls soon enough.

Yusef has taken your place as head of the household, but he is too young to take over such responsibility; he has little wisdom and even less subtlety. He was trying to keep up with his bachelor's program and working full time, but lately he has been talking about giving up school altogether. His job at the shipyard doesn't cover household expenses, and Yusef refuses to let the girls work. He won't let me work until I finish high school, but that is coming soon enough.

But as fall turns to winter, we are more deeply reminded of your absence. Do you remember the first time we saw snow? We were so scared, until you told us it was Allah showering his wishes upon us in this new land, where we could be free and work for a change in Saudi Arabia without fear of police or death. I still believe that, father, but my view of America's sheen of greatness has dulled in my bitter eyes. They took you away, called you a terrorist, charged you with nothing, and haven't let us see you. We have even stopped sending you these letters, for we know now that you do not receive them. We write them in the vague hope that if you are returned; you can read of the love and fear we had for you.

I worry for Dema. She has become so withdrawn since you left, using Islam as her guiding faith. But she only sees the evil in the world, and the peaceful daughter you once knew is gone. She runs now with the fundamentalist Muslims you tried so hard to keep us away from. This ordeal has embittered her to hatred, and neither Yusef, mother, nor I can control her. Our greatest fear is that she will do something ill-advised, and undo all the sacrifices we continue to make for her and Marwa.

But Father, as always, my greatest fear is for you. When will you be released, or charged with a crime, and why were you put there originally? But these questions I dare not ask, for fear of the answers. All I can say, Father, is that we pray for you each day. We hope you will come back soon, without fear or hatred. But most of all, I ask you to remember to keep us in your hearts, and to know that America still holds hope for us, even if now it seems so unforgiving.

Your loving son,
Mohamed