

# Hijab-Ez Friends

By

**Linda D. Delgado**

**Muslim Writers Publishing**

**© 2005 All rights Reserved**

## Introduction—Islamic Rose Family and Friends

**Rose**—Leader of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old only child, Christian background, mixed ethnicity, USA

**Camelia**—Member of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old only child, Muslim, Egyptian-American, USA

**Ruby**—Member of Hijab-Ez, eleven-year-old only child, Protestant Christian, Vietnamese National

**Christina**—Member of Hijab-Ez, ten-year-old with four siblings, Catholic Christian, Hispanic-American, USA

**Grandma (Linda)**—Rose's grandma, police officer, avid gardener, loves crafts, searching for truth about God, doesn't claim any religious affiliation, believes in God but not the Trinity, mixed ethnicity, USA

**Grandpa (Ray)**—Rose's grandpa, retired police officer, works evenings in security, Catholic Christian, Hispanic-American, USA

**Dad (Tony)**—Rose's father, single parent, lives next door to Rose's grandparents, Catholic Christian, mixed ethnicity, USA

**Fahd**—Saudi Arabian police officer, lives at Grandma's home for one year, Muslim, kind and smiles a lot, great story teller

**Abdul**—Saudi Arabian police officer, lives at Grandma's home for one year, Muslim, loves books and astronomy

**Sylvia**—Grandma and Rose’s friend, owner of The Phoenician Restaurant, married to an Arab Muslim, mixed ethnicity, USA

**Judy**—Camelia’s mother, Muslim revert born in USA, loves jewelry, co-owner of Casa Camelia Restaurant, married to an Egyptian, USA

**Zarinah**—Grandma’s friend, Muslim revert born in the USA, sells hijabs and abayas, divorced, African-American, USA

**Mohamed**—Zarinah’s teenage son, Muslim, African-American, USA

**Definition: Hijab-Ez** (pronounced *hijab-ease*) is a word Rose made up to identify the group of Muslim and non-Muslim friends who joined together to support her hijab-wearing school friend, Camelia. A member of the Hijab-Ez is a girl who wears a head covering regardless of her religious beliefs

## Prologue

Rose and Dad live in the southwestern city of Tempe, Arizona, next door to Grandma and Grandpa. Rose stays with her grandparents when Dad is at work or when he isn't at home to care for her. Rose misses having a Mom sometimes, but living next door to Grandma and Grandpa helps ease her sadness.

Fahd and Abdul are police officers in their native country of Saudi Arabia. They have been living at Grandma's house attending Arizona State University to learn English, and will be attending police training at the Phoenix Police Academy.

Rose spent the summer getting to know Grandma's Saudi visitors and learning about their country and Islam. Rose struggled with her dad's dislike of the Saudi officers because they are Arab and Muslim, and her anger towards her dad because his long work hours leave little time for him to spend with her. Now it is fall, and Rose's Dad wants to send her to public school instead of the Christian school where she had gone before...

"I don't want to go to public school! I don't need diversity!" ten-year-old Rose protests to Dad and Grandma. *What is diversity, anyway?* she wonders crossly.

Rose's dad wants her to meet kids of different races, cultures, and religions. *He says the new school will be an adventure. No way! Only a grown-up would tell a kid that going to a new school is an adventure. But, could he be right?*

Tomorrow is the first day of fifth grade, and Rose is struggling to decide what she should wear to school. She always wore school uniforms in the past. *This year, at the public school, many things are going to be different.* How different, Rose can only imagine!

## Chapter 1—Hijab-Ez

A deep frown furrowed Rose's forehead, and the corners of her mouth turned down like an upside-down bowl. Rose sat on the floor of her study-playroom and stared at the open closet. This year, it was filled with brightly colored blouses, pants, skirts, and dresses. Having to pick what she would wear to school was turning into something unpleasant, and it stirred up Rose's doubts and fears. Since preschool, she had attended a private Christian school and had never had to worry about choosing clothes for school because everyone wore the required school uniform.

*What should I wear to school tomorrow? What if I wear a dress and everybody is wearing pants or even shorts! No shorts for me. Dad said shorts are not proper clothes for school.*

Rose chewed on her right thumbnail and eyed the mess she had made of her room. Clothes were scattered around the room and heaped in piles on the floor with their wire hangers poking out here and there.

Rose had been really excited about returning to school this year, until the conversation Grandma and Dad had with her two weeks ago about attending this new public school.

*I don't want to go to this new school! Dad said it would be a great adventure, and didn't she like adventures? Right. Not having any friends and going to a new school is fun? Not for me it isn't,* Rose told herself.

Every time she thought about the new school, since that talk, she got a funny feeling in her stomach. Grandma called the funny feeling butterflies. Rose told her journal friend, Jammie, that it wasn't butterflies; she was just plain scared! Jammie had been her only "friend" during the summer. All her old school classmates lived across the city and too far away to see them very often.

Rose looked up and saw Grandma walking into the room. A tear trickled down one of her cheeks as Rose suddenly wailed, "Oh, Grandma! I want to go to my old school! I don't know anyone at the new school. What if no one likes me? I don't have any friends there. I don't know what to pick to wear tomorrow. I want to go to my old school where I know all the teachers and kids. Why do I have to experience diversity? My old school was just fine." Rose's questions and complaints came to an abrupt end as she flung the wrinkled blouse she was holding towards the opened closet door.

Grandma's usual smile changed to a look of concern after she heard Rose's outburst and saw her dejected posture.

Grandma sat down on the floor beside Rose and hugged her.

"You sound like Fahd and Abdul. Last night both of them sat in the family room, talking about the police classes they are going to start. They don't know any of the instructors or police officers. They wonder if the other police officers will accept them as partners. They are concerned that their English won't be good enough for them to understand all the police terms they need to learn."

“What did you tell them, Grandma?” asked Rose as she wiped the tears away from her cheeks.

“I told them to wear a friendly smile, be themselves, and trust in God. I reassured them I would be ready to help with their written assignments, just like I helped them with their English classes.”

“Do you think that will work for me?”

“Yes, I do, Rose...if you try to be a friend, too. Instead of thinking about your old school and friends, you can see your new school as a challenge. I’ve never known you to back away from a good challenge! Going to a new school can also be an adventure, but only if you decide to make it one.”

Rose still felt a little scared, but listening to Grandma made her feel much better. She stood up and began to gather up the clothes on the floor. “I’m going to clean up this big mess I made.”

“Do you want me to help you choose something for tomorrow, Rose?”

With a hint of confidence, Rose replied, “I think I’ll wait till tomorrow morning to decide what I’ll wear, okay?”

“Sure,” replied Grandma. “I’ll help you pick up these clothes, and then let’s go to the kitchen, fix a snack, and take it outside to the back patio. We can sit on the glider and wait for your dad to get home from work.”

\* \* \*

Rose, Grandma, and Rose's three cat friends—Midnight, Taffy, and Cappy—sat in companionable silence, enjoying the mild breeze and the relaxing motion of the glider.

“Hello, anyone home?”

“It's Dad,” Rose exclaimed as she jumped up from the glider and ran to greet her dad with a hug.

Dad smiled at Rose. “Let's go home and start fixing supper. I'm as hungry as a bear! Tomorrow is a big day for you, Rose. Going to a new school will be fun, and you'll meet new teachers, and make some new friends.”

“My grandma told me the same thing,” giggled Rose. Dad and Rose said their goodbyes to Grandma, walked through the house, and went out the front door. Walking across the lawn towards their house, they saw Grandpa drive into his carport. Grandpa honked the truck horn and waved to Rose. Rose waved back and called out, “See you in the morning, Grandpa.”

\* \* \*

Rose awoke suddenly from a restless night's sleep and glanced at her alarm clock. It was 6:55 AM, and the alarm would go off in another five minutes. Rose pushed the alarm buzzer to the off position and jumped out of bed. She was in a hurry because she hadn't picked out the clothes she was going to wear to school today. Rose tossed the light cover

over her tangled sheets, picked Lion and her pillow up off the floor, and tossed them on top of her bed. She stuck her feet into her slippers hurriedly and rushed out of her bedroom. She entered the kitchen just as Dad was pouring juice into a glass for her.

“How did you sleep, Rose?”

“Okay, except I kept waking up thinking I was going to be late. Can I eat breakfast at Grandma’s house? I have to decide what I’m going to wear today, and Grandma needs to braid my hair for me.”

“That’s fine with me. I’ll walk over with you, and maybe Grandma will fix me breakfast, too!” Dad winked at Rose and tousled her tangled, long, blonde hair. “Don’t forget, Grandma will pick you up after school today, and I’ll be late getting home from work.”

As they walked across the freshly cut summer grass, Rose took a deep breath. The bright Arizona sunshine was already warm on Rose’s face, and the clear blue sky was cloudless. Last month was the rainy season in Arizona. Every year, people looked forward to the monsoon rains that arrived just before Fall and the beginning of the new school year. Grandma’s house and yard had green shrubbery growing everywhere. There were green vines growing up the walls of her house, and the chimney was covered in honeysuckle flowers. Grandma and Grandpa had planted two large green bushes at the corners of the yard, and two very tall pine trees stood like sentries near the front corners, close to the house. Grandma had planted her many rose bushes in flowerbeds along the sides of the house and next to the carport bordering Mr. Gleason’s front yard. Mr. Gleason was Rose’s

favorite neighbor. All the other homes on the street had desert landscaping. Abdul called Grandma's house and yard a green oasis.

Rose's dad opened the front door and smelled the aroma of fresh brewed coffee. Rose followed him inside the cool interior of the living room and called out, "Hello! We're here!"

"I'm in the kitchen," Grandma answered.

Dad went to join his mother while Rose sped through the living room, down the hallway, and straight to the closet in her study-playroom. For once, the over-crowded room was clean and neat. Grandma had placed all of Rose's several dozen stuffed animals on her twin bed and had dusted her scarred, brown, wooden desk that was usually cluttered with Seek 'N Find puzzles, open books, and empty juice bottles. Grandma had stacked her scooter, bicycle helmet, balls, and assorted Frisbees in a neat pile in one corner, next to the cabinet that held her ten cookie tins filled with her rock collection. Rose smiled with satisfaction as she eyed all the posters of animals covering the four walls in her room. Rose planned to become an animal doctor when she grew up. She opened the closet and without any hesitation picked a pink blouse and matching pants to wear, pink being Rose's favorite color.

After dressing, Rose got a pink hair tie and her brush, and went to look for her grandparents and her dad. She found them sitting at the dining room table eating cereal and reading the newspaper. "My! Don't you look nice!" Grandpa said as Rose grinned and sat down next to him. Grandma set a bowl of raisin bran cereal and a plate of raisin toast in

front of her. Rose loved raisins, and raisin toast was her second favorite, next to cinnamon toast. Suddenly, Rose didn't feel hungry any more.

Dad looked up from the sports page and reminded Rose to brush her teeth when she got through eating. Rose nodded her head and went back to staring at her breakfast.

Rose slowly stirred her cereal round and around in the bowl, but didn't eat any. *Oh, no!* She thought with consternation. *Here come those butterflies in my stomach again.*

Grandma seemed to understand that Rose was feeling nervous. She smiled and said, "Why not have a piece of toast right now, and I'll put some fruit in your book bag in case you get hungry at recess time?"

"Thanks, Grandma," Rose said gratefully and pushed the cereal towards Grandpa. "Want some cereal, Grandpa?" Rose asked in a joking manner. Grandpa didn't answer Rose, so she winked at Grandma and jabbed her index finger into Grandpa's opened paper to get his attention. Once Grandpa started to read the paper, it was next to impossible to get him to carry on a conversation.

"Hey! What's going on? Do you want something?" Grandpa peeked over the top of his opened newspaper.

"Can we leave now? I don't want to be late my first day of school."

"Just one minute, young lady." Grandma held up Rose's hairbrush. "You can't go to school with your hair looking like a bird's nest!"

Rose grimaced. She hated to have her long hair brushed. Grandma always fixed it in a single braid or a ponytail, but Rose liked to let her hair hang free. Grandma began brushing

the snarls from Rose's hair. "Ouch!" squealed Rose as Grandma tugged the brush through the tangled mass of blonde hair.

Grandma surprised Rose by asking, "Do you want to wear your hair hanging down and use your pink headband?" When Rose's hair was properly brushed, it looked like spun gold as it lay in waves down her back.

*What?! No braid or the hated ponytail!* Rose silently pondered this change in Grandma's usual routine. Her eyes began to tear at their corners, and she said grumpily, "I guess I'll just wear the usual braid...Ouch!" Rose squealed again. "Don't brush so hard, Grandma."

Rose's eyes never seemed to be the same color. Their color changed with the color of the sky. Right now, they looked like a gray and stormy sky, and the tears in the corners of her squinting eyes looked like raindrops about to fall.

"I'm sorry," said Grandma as she quickly finished braiding Rose's hair. "Before Fahd and Abdul left for their training academy this morning, they asked me to give you something."

"A surprise!" exclaimed Rose. A smile began to spread across her face as Grandma handed Rose a lovely new bookmark. It was green with gold scrolling around the edges and it had Arabic writing on it. Rose looked intently at the writing and then asked, "What does it say?"

"The writing is an Islamic du'a that asks God to watch over you as you travel."

Rose walked over to her book bag and put the bookmark in a side pocket. "It's so pretty, Grandma. I'll probably need to use it today!"

Rose had grown to love the two Saudi police officers. Over the summer, she had helped Grandma teach them English and she had learned a lot about their country and Islam. Fahd was taller than Abdul, and his hair was a lighter brown and wavy. Fahd liked to spend quiet time with Rose, playing board games or just talking. Abdul was at least a head shorter than Fahd. His hair was very dark and curly, and he wore black-rimmed glasses. Abdul always seemed to be in a hurry. He loved to read and cook. Like Rose, he was interested in astronomy. Last summer he had helped Rose put together her new telescope and showed her how to use it. Fahd loved to tell stories about famous Muslim people in Islam's history and stories about his life growing up on a rural farm near Jeddah. He told Rose that story telling was a family tradition. Abdul liked to be among his friends and he was always looking for places in Arizona that he and Fahd could explore.

Rose hurried to the restroom, did a 1-2-3 quick brush, and told herself she'd brush her teeth extra tonight.

When she returned to the living room, Grandma took Grandpa's and Rose's hands, and they all bowed their heads. Dad sat at the dining room table watching them. Grandma prayed, "God watch over Rose while she is at school today. Help her make friends, and do well in each of her classes, and bring her home safely. Amen."

Rose ran to her dad and hugged him—and then Grandma—before following Grandpa out to the truck. As they pulled out of the driveway, Rose bravely called out, "Don't worry, Grandma and Dad, I'm going to have a good day."

Grandpa and Rose arrived at the school a few minutes later and walked back to the playground area for fourth and fifth grade students. Each morning, the students were supposed to wait there until the starting school bell rang. There were so many kids on the playground. At her previous school there had been only three hundred students, but this school had nearly seven hundred students.

“Wait with me until the bell rings, Grandpa,” Rose said in a squeaky voice. The butterflies were back and fluttering like a fan at high speed! Rose held onto Grandpa’s hand as she silently watched the other students on the playground. She looked to her right and saw a girl standing next to the building wall. The girl was by herself and she had her head covered with a hijab scarf!

Rose was surprised. She hadn’t expected to see a Muslim girl at this school...well, she really didn’t know what to expect! Rose couldn’t see the girl’s face because she kept her head down. *I wonder if she’s in my class.* “Grandpa, I think the girl standing over there must be new at this school, too. She’s all alone.”

Grandpa looked in the direction Rose was pointing and saw the hijab-covered girl. “Maybe you could walk over to her and say hello.”

Rose hesitated for a minute. She was trying to decide what to do when the school bell rang. The kids on the playground began lining up at the door of the classroom where they were assigned. Rose’s classroom was number forty-three, Mrs. Rodriguez’s homeroom. She went to stand in line, after hugging Grandpa goodbye, and noticed the girl in the hijab

went to stand at the very end of the same line she was in. Rose smiled at the girl and tried to get her attention, but the girl in the hijab kept her head bent down.

The classroom door opened, and Mrs. Rodriguez greeted each student with a smile as they entered the classroom. Students began walking around the tables, looking for their name card. Rose went to each table until she found her name, put her book bag on the floor, and sat in the chair behind her name card. She watched the doorway to see where the girl in the hijab would sit. The girl was the last to enter the room and she walked slowly past the tables looking for her name. As she approached the table where Rose was seated, she stopped at the chair directly across from Rose, put her book bag down, and sat in the chair. Rose looked at the girl's name card and read the name that was printed neatly on the card: Camelia Huymahia.

Rose decided to try and get the girl's attention again. She took a deep breath and then spoke directly to the girl. "Hello, my name is Rose Allen." The girl in the hijab looked up and smiled, but didn't answer. Rose noticed that Camelia had light brown eyes, and her skin color was as white as Rose's skin. Rose was surprised and curious, because she hadn't seen any Muslims who had light skin color. *Well*, she thought, *I haven't really seen very many Muslims!*

Two other girls sat down at the table next to Rose and Camelia. Rose looked at both girls in a friendly way and said, "Hello, my name is Rose Allen." The two girls didn't answer her, but began to whisper and look over at Camelia. *How rude they are!* Rose thought. Rose turned her back to them and pretended not to notice that they were whispering. She didn't

know for sure if they were whispering about Camelia or her, but Rose didn't like it either way!

Rose sat quietly in her chair and thought dejectedly, *this isn't a very good beginning for me at my new school.*

\* \* \*

The morning seemed to fly by, and before Rose knew it, the lunch bell rang. When Rose went to line up, she tried again to talk to Camelia. "Would you like to sit with me and eat lunch?"

Camelia turned her face away from Rose and didn't answer. Rose shrugged her shoulders and had about decided to give up on being friendly towards Camelia, when she had an idea.

*Maybe Camelia didn't speak or understand English? That might explain why she didn't answer me!* Rose thought.

Some of the students in her class were from Mexico, and they didn't speak English very well. Grandma had explained that her class would be bi-lingual, meaning a tutor would be in the class to help the non-English speaking students until they learned English.

During the afternoon recess, Rose stood alone at the far end of the building wall, watching the other students talking and playing. She noticed that Camelia was standing alone at the other end of the wall. When the teacher had introduced herself that morning, she had

also introduced the new students to the school. Camelia was a new student, just like Rose. Rose had another idea about why Camelia didn't talk to her or anyone else. *Maybe she's nervous, like me?*

Rose struggled within herself. *Should I walk over to Camelia and try again?* Suddenly it dawned on Rose that she had a way to let Camelia know that she wanted to be friends. *If it works*, she thought, *Camelia will talk to me!* Rose took a deep breath to try and calm those pesky butterflies fluttering around in her tummy and walked over to where Camelia was standing. She stood directly in front of Camelia and said, "As-Salaam'Alaykum, Camelia."

Camelia looked up at Rose with surprise flooding her face to be replaced by a broad smile that seemed to brighten and animate Camelia. "Wa'alaykum as-Salaam," she replied back to Rose and quickly added, "Do you speak Arabic?"

"You speak English!" Rose exclaimed excitedly.

Camelia and Rose burst out laughing. What a relief it was for both of them!

Rose took the initiative and said, "I only know a few Arabic words. Two police officers from Saudi Arabia are living at my grandma's house this year, and I learned to say the Muslim greeting because of them. You are Muslim, aren't you?"

"Yep, I'm a Muslimah, and I think it's so cool that you have two Muslim brothers living at your Grandma's house. Do you get to see them and talk to them much?" Camelia asked in a rush. Before Rose could answer her, Camelia said, "My father is from Egypt, but my mother and I were born in the United States."

“You don’t look like an Egyptian. Your skin is so white and you have a gazillion freckles just like me!” Rose pointed to the freckles sprinkled across her nose and cheeks.

“Everyone in my family says I have the same features as my dad, but I have fair skin like my mom,” replied Camelia. “I’m sorry I didn’t talk to you this morning. The other two girls at our table were whispering about my hijab. I think they were laughing at me.”

Rose nodded her head and said, “I know. They were so...rude! I turned my back because I didn’t want to hear what they were saying. Why aren’t you playing on the playground with the other kids? I saw you this morning standing by yourself when my Grandpa brought me to school.”

“I tried to join a group of girls, but one of them told me to go away, and the others started laughing. A boy tried to pull my hijab, so I came over here by the wall to get away from them.” Rose noticed that Camelia’s voice sounded a little shaky, and she looked so sad, now that her smile had disappeared.

Rose began to feel angry towards the kids who had been unkind to Camelia. “Point out the girls that laughed at you this morning, and I will go and talk to them about not being so mean,” she declared with determination.

Camelia vigorously shook her head. “Don’t say anything to them. If you do, those girls will probably just tease me more, and then they will be mean to you, too.”

“Well, are you going to at least tell the teacher about them, especially that boy who tried to pull your scarf?” Rose asked her new friend.

“I’m going to wait a few days and see if they act any differently towards me once they get used to seeing me in my hijab. I’m hoping they will stop the teasing without me making a big deal out of this.”

The recess bell rang, and Rose and Camelia went to get in line to go back to the classroom. Rose whispered to Camelia, “Tomorrow morning, before the bell rings for class, I will meet you at the wall, okay?” Camelia shook her head yes and smiled.

\* \* \*

Rose was anxious for the last bell to ring for school to be over for the day. She wanted to talk to Grandma about her new friend, Camelia, and to ask Grandma for ideas about getting the other girls in her class not to tease or whisper about Camelia.

The last bell sounded. *At last it’s time to go home.* Rose hurried out of the classroom and looked across the street where Grandma was in her car, waving at Rose.

Grandma watched as Rose crossed the street at the crosswalk and walked towards the car. *My! What a serious look she has on her face. I wonder what is troubling my sweet Rose.*

Rose opened the passenger door and said, “Hi, Grandma. Did you miss me?”

“Not one little itchy-bitsy bit,” teased Grandma. “You had such a serious and determined look on your face a second ago...anything wrong?”

As Grandma started driving home, Rose told Grandma about her new friend, Camelia, and how the other girls in her class had teased her. “I’m worried about that boy who tried to pull off Camelia’s hijab, too.”

“Did Camelia speak to the playground monitor or your teacher?”

“No, she says she is hoping the girls will stop whispering and laughing once they get to know her.”

“What do you think about Camelia’s way of handling this problem?” inquired Grandma.

“I think they will keep bothering her and being mean until they know they will get into trouble for doing that to her,” Rose said with a very determined look on her face. “I think Camelia should tell the teacher about the boy, because he shouldn’t be grabbing her hijab. If he pulls it off, Camelia will be so embarrassed!”

“Maybe tomorrow you can suggest to Camelia that she talk privately with the teacher. You could go with her if she is a little nervous,” suggested Grandma.

“Okay, Grandma. I think that’s what I’ll do if anyone starts teasing or laughing at Camelia tomorrow.”

“Maybe you could ask Camelia to try again to talk to the girls at your table. Then perhaps they might see that she is a nice person to have as a friend,” suggested Grandma.

“Grandma, I’ll have to think about that suggestion. Maybe I should wait and see how the two girls at my table act tomorrow.”

“So, how was your first day of school, other than the problem you just told me about?” Grandma asked as she stopped at a stop sign before turning the car onto the street where they lived.

“I had a good day, Grandma, because I made a new friend,” said Rose happily.

When they pulled into Grandma’s driveway, Rose noticed that the carport was empty. “Where is everyone? I want to tell everyone about my first day at school. I want to tell Fahd and Abdul about my new friend, Camelia!” Rose frowned and her disappointment echoed in the tone of her voice.

“I knew you were going to be disappointed at finding no one here when you got home. Fahd and Abdul are going to be very busy the next few months at training. They have to leave early in the mornings to participate in physical fitness training before their classes. After class, they will be going to a friend’s house to study. Their friend, Mohamed, has an apartment, and Mohamed's wife came over from Saudi Arabia during the summer break. The boys will be eating dinner there sometimes when they study with Mohamed.”

“But, but,” sputtered Rose, “I won’t get to see them hardly at all!”

“I know you were looking forward to seeing the boys, but now that school has started, you will be busy with homework, just like Fahd and Abdul.”

“Where is my Grandpa?” Rose asked crossly.

“Why, Rose! I’m surprised at your question and the tone of your voice! You know your Grandpa leaves for work every afternoon at 2:30 PM!” Grandma had raised her voice

only a little bit, but Rose recognized that tone of voice. It meant “no more arguing or complaining!”

Still Rose persisted and she tried again. “But I thought you were going to help Fahd and Abdul with their police classes like you helped them with their English classes.”

Grandma recognized that Rose was tired and that it had been a difficult first day for her at the new school. She gave Rose a gentle hug and replied, “I will be helping them when they need my help, Rose. When they do come home to study, I will telephone, and you can come over and visit for a few minutes, okay?”

“Okay,” Rose replied softly. Today had not been at all what Rose had expected. She liked her teachers and her new friend. The school was so big she had gotten lost a couple of times. Rose was still worried about making other friends. *I'm worried about my new friend, Camelia, too!*

\* \* \*

The next morning, and every morning that week, Rose and Camelia met at the wall by the playground entrance. They also sat together for lunch and spent time together during recess. On Thursday, they saw another girl standing alone at the other end of the wall. *Funny, I hadn't noticed her standing there before today.* Rose looked again and remembered she was the really tall girl in her class. *Well, anyone is really tall compared to me; I'm a shrimp boat,* Rose thought as she watched the tall girl.

Rose and Camelia talked it over for a minute and decided to go over to the girl and say hello. Rose noticed that the girl was Oriental, and Camelia suggested that maybe she was Japanese.

The tall girl looked down at Rose and Camelia, and smiled. She was at least a head taller than both of them. They were shorties. Rose described herself as a skinny-minnie, and Camelia told herself that she was pleasantly plump, although her mom always said she was chunky or that she came from good peasant stock from her mother's ancestors.

In a very soft voice, the tall girl said, "Hello, my name is Ruby Nye. I am new to this school and this country. My parents and I moved here from Vietnam this past summer."

Rose smiled at Ruby and exclaimed, "You speak English just like me!"

Ruby laughed and said, "My father got me an English tutor a year before we moved here because he didn't want me to have problems in school." Ruby stopped smiling and said, "I guess it didn't do much good, because I'm still having problems. The other girls in our class have been making fun of me because I am so tall. One of them said I had funny eyes and she even crossed her eyes when she said it!"

Rose could tell by Ruby's shaky voice that she was very hurt. Camelia patted Ruby's arm and said, "You can be our friend, Ruby." Ruby smiled back at them, and the three girls decided they would be friends.

\* \* \*

Friday of the first week of school arrived, and there wasn't any change in the way the other girls in Rose's class treated Ruby and Camelia. They also stopped talking to Rose because she spent lunchtime and all her recess with her two new friends. Rose was tired of their pointing fingers, giggles, and whispers whenever they walked by Rose and her friends. Rose was having a hard time not saying anything to them. Both Ruby and Camelia said they didn't want to have an argument with the other girls. Rose had at least persuaded Camelia to report the boy who tried a second time to pull off her hijab. Now the boy walked the other way whenever he saw them.

While waiting for the bell to ring to go home, Rose sat at her table and thought about the problem with the other girls in her class. Slowly, an idea began to form in her mind, and then, like a bolt of lightning flashing across a stormy sky, a solution to the problem crystallized into the beginnings of a PLAN! The bell rang and startled Rose. She had to hurry to catch up with Ruby and Camelia so she could tell them her great PLAN. As the girls talked, they became more excited and agreed that they would put their PLAN into action next Monday morning.

Rose, Ruby, and Camelia hugged each other, separated, and walked to their parents' cars. All three were smiling, but Camelia wore the biggest smile.

Grandma saw Rose and the other girls hugging and saw their big smiles. She thought, *Maybe the problem with the other girls has been resolved.* When Rose got to the car, Grandma asked, "Have you got some good news for me?"

Rose looked at Grandma and tried to hide her smile. “Nothing much is new, Grandma,” she replied with an air of total innocence. Rose didn’t want to tell her family about the PLAN just yet.

“I have a surprise for you. Fahd and Abdul will be home right after Jumu’ah prayer, and we are going to The Phoenician Restaurant to eat our supper!”

“Awesome! Is my dad going, too?”

“No, dear. Remember, he stayed to see you off to school this morning, so he has to work late. He’ll be home about 9:00 PM.” Rose was disappointed, but not for long, because she had a lot of work to do before Monday.

Fahd, Abdul, Rose, and Grandma went to The Phoenician Restaurant and had so much fun visiting with everyone that it was after 9:00 PM when they finally returned to Grandma’s house. Rose was tired, even too tired to chat with Jammie, her journal. Within minutes of their arrival, Rose’s dad came to the house to walk Rose home. She hugged Fahd, Abdul, and Grandma goodnight before leaving with her dad.

\* \* \*

Saturday morning, Rose got up very early to get her chores done. She wanted to get started on the PLAN right away. After a scrambled eggs, toast with strawberry jam, and strawberry milk breakfast with Dad, she went next door to use Grandma’s computer. When

she was finished with the computer, she went to find Grandma. Rose needed some craft and sewing supplies.

Rose found Grandma making beds. “Do you need my help?” Rose asked politely.

Grandma took one look at the excitement shining from Rose’s eyes and the paper she held in her hands, and knew Rose was up to something. “What important project are you working on?” Grandma asked. She couldn’t help asking her next question. Rose’s secretive actions were making her curious. “Are you working on something for school?” Rose shook her head. “Is it a secret?”

A grin slowly spread across Rose’s face. “I have a PLAN to help Ruby and Camelia. Don’t worry, Grandma. Nobody will get into any trouble. I promise! I need your help. I want to borrow some of your craft supplies. I made a list of the things for you.”

Grandma read the list, which included glue, glitter, safety pins, colored markers, white poster board, and pieces of colored felt. “I think I can help you out,” Grandma said as she and Rose walked to the corner of the computer room where Grandma stored her craft materials. “Get what you need and then clean up any messes, okay?”

“Thanks! I’ll return anything I don’t use,” Rose said as she began shopping at Grandma’s craft corner.

Grandma silently thanked God for the friendship Rose had shown and received from her new friends. “Will you tell me about your PLAN on Monday after school?”

Rose just smiled and teased Grandma with, “Maybe I will and maybe I won’t!”

Later that afternoon, Rose and Grandpa went to the pizza place and spent a couple of hours playing video games. Rose told Grandpa all about her week at school, and then she told him the details of her PLAN. Rose didn't have a choice because she needed Grandpa's help.

“Promise you won't tell anyone?” Rose questioned her grandpa.

“Can I tell Grandma that you have a good PLAN so she won't be worried?” Last summer Rose had made a PLAN to get her dad to take Fahd and Abdul car shopping, and her dad had exploded because she hadn't told him anything about her PLAN until she asked him to help Fahd and Abdul right in front of them and her grandparents!

“Okay, but don't say what the PLAN is. If it doesn't work, I don't think I want everyone knowing about it,” said Rose in a very serious voice.

Sunday evening, Rose spent the night at Grandma's house. Dad had to stay late at work again because of some new crisis. For once, Rose didn't complain about this because she was too busy putting together everything she needed for her PLAN the next day. She also needed to have a chat with Jammie, her journal.

\* \* \*

At last Monday arrived! Rose gulped her breakfast and ran back to her study-playroom. She retrieved a paper bag from the closet, hurried back to the family room, and

put the paper bag in her book bag. “All ready to go,” Rose said to Grandpa. Grandma had left over an hour ago to drive to her office in Phoenix.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Rose?” Grandpa asked as he stopped his truck across from the school. Rose could see Camelia and Ruby standing by the wall, waving to her.

With chin jugged forward, a tilt of her head, and determination ringing in her voice, she replied, “I’m ready!” Rose gave Grandpa a quick hug, and he chuckled as he watched his granddaughter hurry towards the school grounds to meet her waiting friends.

Rose greeted Ruby and Camelia, and the three of them walked quickly to the girl’s restroom. Once inside, Rose took two of Grandpa’s large blue handkerchiefs from the brown paper bag and folded them in triangles. Ruby and Rose put the “scarves” on their heads and tied the ends under their hair at the back of their necks. Rose handed Ruby two bobby pins, and both girls secured the handkerchief scarves to their hair.

Next, Rose took three, small, poster-board squares that were covered with colored felt material from the bag. One square was green with gold glitter around the borders. Rose gave the green felt square to Camelia. The second felt square was blue with silver glitter on its borders. Rose handed this square to Ruby. The last felt square was pink with purple glitter around the borders. This square was for Rose. On the back of the felt squares, Rose had put a safety pin. Each of the girls pinned their felt square onto their blouses.

They looked at each other, stood in a line in front of the mirror, and grinned at their reflections. “Are we ready?” asked Rose.

“Ready!” Camelia and Ruby practically yelled and then giggled.

Rose held up her hand to silence the nervous laughter of her friends. “Remember, before we go into the classroom, we have to take off our pins. We can’t wear them in the classroom. We only wear them in the morning, before the first class bell rings.” Ruby and Camelia nodded their heads and looked solemnly at Rose.

The three girls skipped back to the playground with their arms linked and grins plastered on their faces. Instead of going to stand at the wall like they had done all last week, they sauntered over to where the other girls in their class were standing around talking to each other. When they got right next to them, Camelia and Rose put their fingers to the corners of their eyes and pulled the skin back to make their eyes look slanted. They paused to make sure the group of girls was looking at them. In unison, they said loudly, “Hijab-Ez! Friends forever!” They pointed to their felt squares. Typed in the center of each square, in large black letters, was the word “Hijab-Ez.” Rose, Camelia, and Ruby then smiled sweetly at the group of girls and walked past them.

Rose, Camelia, and Ruby walked slowly back to their wall and tried really hard not to laugh out loud, but they just couldn’t help themselves. “Did you see their faces?” giggled Camelia.

“They were speechless,” Ruby sputtered and covered her mouth with her hand so her laughter didn’t sound so loud.

Rose didn’t say anything. She looked at the group of girls standing together a short distance from Rose and her friends. Rose watched the girls gesturing wildly and talking at the

same time. Finally, Rose turned to Ruby and Camelia, and said with conviction, “Now, they know where we stand!”

The first bell rang, and the girls hurried to take off their Hijab-Ez pins. Rose put them in her book bag. Rose and Ruby decided they would continue to wear their new handkerchief-now-scarves. News, or more accurately gossip, spread quickly, and Rose’s classmates were buzzing by the time Mrs. Rodriguez stood at the front of the classroom to take attendance. Rose held her breath when she saw the teacher looking at her and then Ruby.

Suddenly, Mrs. Rodriguez gave each of them a big smile. *What a relief! I thought we were in trouble for sure!* Rose thought as she slowly exhaled.

Rose felt someone pulling on her blouse sleeve. It was Christina Gomez. Christina sat at the same table with Rose and Camelia, but never talked to either of them. Christina whispered, “Can I join your club? I have a blue handkerchief. Can I have one of those pins? What does that word mean?”

Rose and Camelia sat there and looked at one another. Then slowly the smiles on their faces became very big grins. Rose turned to Christina and said, “Hijab-Ez means you are a person who shows support for Muslim girls who wears a hijab head covering by also wearing a head covering. We are not a club. We are a group of friends. It’s up to Camelia if you can join us and become a Hijab-Ez. Camelia is our leader today.”

Christina looked hopefully across the table to see what Camelia would say. Camelia smiled at Christina and held out her pinkie finger. The two girls intertwined their pinkie fingers and whispered, “Hijab-Ez! Friends forever!”