MYM LITERATURE

Quilt of Kindness

by Rahma Zakaria

Where Muslims come home to reflect

Quilt of Kindness

By Rahma Zakaria
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This piece was published as part of an MYM partnership with Washington, D.C.'s Muslim Inter-scholastic Tournament (MIST). The highlight of the year for many high school youth, MIST is a nationwide competition that pits teams from high school Muslim groups against each other in a weekend full of intense contests, community building and youth empowerment.

Representing team Dar-us-Salaam, Rahma Zakaria won first place in the literary poetry contest, one of dozens of contests ranging from Quran memorization to basketball. The piece reflects on this year's theme, "The Art of Generosity: Finding the Greatness to Give." Zakaria was awarded a trophy, a feature on the website and automatic entry into our staff. To learn more about MIST, visit the D.C. chapter's website or connect with them on Facebook.

We are honored to partner with MIST, an organization that has inspired many of our writers and challenges youth to confront challenges facing young American Muslims. We hope this piece, "Quilt of Kindness" and our work continue to inspire you to weave new narratives, thoughts and ideas.

– Fatimah Waseem, editor-in-chief

Agile fingers adeptly push a needle through layers

as she pieces together paper-thin remnants of past kindness.

She sews in reminiscent patches of color.
Navy blue- reflecting the aquatic depth of
the shirt her older brother was wearing
when he stopped his studies for a second
to push her on the swings once,
twice,
and again.

Mahogany- the hair color of her second grade friend
who saved her the last piece
of her favorite cake every day
like a tree bearing its beloved fruit.
Violet- like the calming pendant
from her next door neighbor
who gave it to her with hugs and the comfort of a field of wildflowers
after she received a letter of rejection from her dream university.
Mint green- fresh and sharp
like her mother's memorable breath and sparkling eyes
which permeated the chilly morning air like the smell of evergreens
when she unexpectedly visited her dorm with a home cooked lunch.
And vermilion- shades as different as the phases of the moon
like the fading purse of the stranger in a grocery store
who slipped her a twenty dollar bill
as she frantically searched for her wallet
which was hidden under the cozy cushions of her living room couch.
She frames her masterpiece with the talent of da Vinci and the spirit of Keller
with pastel tints of sky blue – tan – lavender – light green – rose
reminding her to always paint nursery walls, to play with unhappy

children,
to cook for new neighbors when the old one goes
and to never forget to grant the gift of color
to anyone who needs it, whenever she knows...
Puzzle pieces held together by
the fragile strength of
the thread of life.
She bends down now
to place her quilt of memories gingerly
around the shivering body of her newborn
perhaps he may share its vibrant warmth with the world
when she is no longer there to feel it.

At some point in their lives, many people come to a sudden realization. These bursts of realization are serendipitous, but often potent enough to push them to change their lives for the better.

This poem records one woman's 'Aha!' moment, which comes to her while she sews together patches for a quilt. Each patch reminds her of generous acts that people showed her throughout her earlier life. Blue reminds her of her brother being generous with his time/effort, like rainwater falling on a river, therefore having "aquatic depth." Mahogany and violet remind her of friends who always shared things they loved, therefore resembling a reliable tree and a calming flower patch, respectively. Green reminds her of her mother's random but welcome visit, just like the smell of pine trees is not very common, but when one smells its scent, it brings a calm, wintry feeling. Finally, shades of vermilion remind her of the waxing and waning moon, which was represented through the worn out purse of a stranger who helped her when she needed it the most – the stranger's wallet waned

after giving money, but because charity never decreases wealth, it will eventually wax with returned money.

After the interior of the quilt is finished, her transition into framing the quilt represents her transition into adulthood – learning from the people who were generous to her, and now being generous herself. She uses lighter shades of the colors in her quilt, as gentle reminders to herself. Finally, she gives her masterpiece to her child. It is a physical and metaphorical act of kindness, as she hopes to pass on the "reminders" to her child.

Life is not only a series of events, but also a series of interactions. And so it seems appropriate to represent the events and interactions we go through as patches, held together by the thread of life. Quilts, as resilient and functional pieces of art, hold together other things as well. A quilt ties together the themes of this poem, because while colors remind the woman of transient events in her lifetime, associating the events with the constancy of nature makes those short events almost eternal in her mind.

Just like any other effective artwork, the quilt allows her to capture the essence of both colors and nature. A quilt ties together "the talent of da Vinci and the spirit of Keller," because Leonardo da Vinci was known for his masterful paintings but unpleasant attitude, and Helen Keller was known for being impaired but still giving all her effort to help the world through her actions and speech. The main character, this woman, combines the best aspects of both characters by creating a beautiful quilt and sharing it as well. Finally, a quilt ties together the woman's childhood and adulthood: her inspiration and how those inspirations influenced her life.

Every person sews together their own quilt as they go through life.

You have the option of making a masterpiece that is folded up and left to dust in the attic, or creating an artwork that is passed down for generations, benefiting people even after you leave the world. You have the power to leave a legacy, if you choose to do so.