

## READING PASSAGE FOR BOOKSIGNING

### INTRODUCTION:

This is a brief passage from the romance/adventure novel, *The Vengeance Trap*, a story about two lovers who are anything but typical. She is Irish. Her name is Kathleen O'Toole. He is Persian. His name is Omar Jabri. They meet on an icy beach of the Irish sea late one winter night. She's a commando in the Irish Republican Army. He's a gun-runner. Omar is three days late with a delivery of stolen guns and Kathleen is so mad at him for being late that she almost shoots him on sight. So you know they've *got* to fall in love, right?

This book is about the importance of family. In this passage, Omar Jabri and his ten-year old son Shafi are on a camping trip together on a mountain in the Canary Islands. The subject of this passage is prejudice and how much it can hurt. Especially how much it can hurt an innocent young child. This passage of the book also shows the importance of a father's love.

As you listen, try to imagine what these two persons look like. Omar is in his thirties, he looks Persian, with a dark skin, very dark eyes, and a sharp nose. His little boy, Shafi, looks a lot like his father and he has a tender heart, like his mother. Kathleen and Omar have two sons, Shafi and Michael. Michael looks Irish like his mom but has his dad's all-business temperament..

In this passage, Shafi must deal with prejudice. We open as father and son are climbing the mountain toward their camping site, which Shafi has never seen before.

“How do you know this place, da?” Shafi asked as father and son were backpacking their gear up the side of Calle Mountain.

“My grandfather Atash used to come here,” Omar said. He puffed from the climb. The load on his back was heavy. “Built himself a wood cabin on this mountain.”

“What does Atash mean?”

“It's an old Persian name. It means fire.”

“Wait a minute! Isn't your middle name Al-Atash, da?”

“Yes. I was named after him.”

“Then you've got fire in your name, too!” Shafi laughed.

“I think all the Jabri men have fire in them. Including you.”

“I thought all your ancestors stayed on ships in the ocean, da.”

“Mostly, grandfather Atash *did* stay on his ship. But sometimes he needed a place to hide. When the Spanish navy chased him too hard. He built a hideout up here.”

“Are we going to see it?”

“No. It's gone now.”

“What happened to it?”

Omar was thinking as fast as he could. Atash’s house. What happened? Atash. Fire.

“He burned down his cabin. But we’re going to camp right where it used to be. About a thousand years ago.”

Omar looked sideways at Shafi and waited for his son’s reaction to the start of a story. He didn’t have long to wait.

Shafi stopped and put down his knapsack.

“Why did he burn down his own house?”

Omar sat and removed his heavy backpack, glad for a brief rest. “No choice. He saw some thieves coming up the mountain. They were going to steal his treasure map.” Omar was making this up bit by bit. Parts of it weren’t easy.

“Why didn’t he just burn the map? Or grab it and run?”

Omar thought a moment. “Couldn’t. He couldn’t grab it, and he couldn’t burn the map without burning down the house.” Now Omar was sure of where this story was going. The next question was going to be the clincher.

“Why?”

“Because the map was chiseled into the bedroom wall.”

How much was Shafi buying? Omar wasn’t sure. He needed time to think of more details.

“I’ll tell you all about it tonight. Now pick up your gear, and let’s go.”

After half a day of climbing and resting, they reached their destination, a bluff overlooking the town of Calle. The face of the bluff was broad and steep, a cliff actually.

“Is this the place, da?”

“Hmm?”

“You know. Where Grandfather Atash built his house and then burned it down. Tell me about it.”

“Oh, yes. But, you know, a story like that has to be told under the stars. You’ll have to wait until bed time.”

On a clear day, Calle could be seen from this bluff, its streets full of color. But on this cloudy day in Calle, the town beneath them lay blanketed by a cottony mass tinged with gold, while on the mountain, Omar and Shafi stood in bright sunshine, a world of calm and solitude.

With their tent pitched and the campsite put in order, father and son rested again. They lay side by side on their backs, gazed at the heavens, and discussed the animals and monsters that drifted in the clouds above.

The afternoon drew to a close and Omar built a small fire to prepare their evening meal. The fire burned low, and Omar stoked the coals while Shafi tried to roast two fresh goat meat sausages on sticks.

“I don’t know, da. I think we might have waited too long to cook.”

“Well, that’s easy to fix. We need a few more pieces of wood for the fire.”

“I’ll get some!” Shafi said. “I saw some good branches when we came up!”

“Okay,” Omar said. “But don’t go near the edge.”

Soon Shafi was back with dry sticks, and in a few minutes, the sausages were ready.

“Are we higher than an airplane?” Shafi asked as he gazed down at the cloud cover below them.

“Higher than a small airplane, maybe,” Omar said.

“If we stayed up here, I bet no one could ever find us,” Shafi said.

Omar smiled and said, “And your mother? And Michael? Wouldn’t you want them to find us?”

“Oh, sure. They could come up. It’s those others I’m talking about. They could never find us, I bet,” Shafi said.

“What others, son?” Omar asked in a gentle voice.

Shafi was silent a moment before he said, “I don’t know if I should talk about it, da.”

“You don’t have to, unless you want to.” Omar could see he did.

Shafi shrugged. “Okay, then. The ones who hate you. And ma. And me.” He said the words in a painful way, as though he were talking about the poison of a snake bite.

“They hate Michael, too, even though he looks Irish. They hate him when they know we’re his family.”

Omar saw his son was hiding pain.

“Come here, son,” Omar urged gently as he pulled him down so they could sit face to face on the grass. “Who hates us?” he asked as he looked into Shafi’s sad eyes.

Suddenly Shafi burst into tears, crying as though his heart would break. Omar held him against his breast, his arms close around the boy. He was shocked. There had been no hint that Shafi was in so much pain.

“Shh, now. Shh,” he whispered, and put a few light kisses along the side and top of Shafi’s head. His son’s natural scent came up from the boy’s hair and filled Omar’s heart. *He’s so much like his mother, yet he’s the mirror image of me.*

“Do you want to tell me?” Omar whispered.

“No,” Shafi sobbed. “Yes.”

“Now what’s this all about? Hmm?” Omar smiled at his son to encourage him. He was pretty certain he knew what this was all about.

Shafi shrugged his shoulders, as though in despair. “I don’t know. It’s just people. The way they are, sometimes.”

Omar waited.

“Do you know what I mean?”

“I think so. But why don’t you tell me.”

“They say things. They call a person names.”

“Who do they call names, son?”

“You.” Shafi started to cry again. “And me. And Michael. They call us filthy. And sex fiends.”

Omar stroked Shafi’s shoulders and gave the boy time. Shafi’s crying slowed to a pattern of infrequent sobs.

“It hurts,” Omar said. “I know.” He was determined to hide his rage. *That’s not what Shafi needs to see right now*, he resolved.

“I want to kill them!”

“Shafi, if you kill the people who hate you, you are no better than they are. Worse. You’d be a killer.”

Shafi nodded and said, “I wouldn’t like to be a killer.” He looked at his father for hope, a tentative smile on his face.

“No, you wouldn’t like it. You know what I think you’d like to be, when you grow up?”

“What?” Shafi was starting to feel better.

“I think you’d like to sail big ships across the ocean. Just like me.”

“Oh, yes! That would be fun!” The ugly people were forgotten for now.

“Maybe you will. I’d like you to. You know what I’d like you to do right now?” Omar asked playfully.

“What?” Shafi asked with a big smile, eager to have a game.

“Go get some more wood! This fire’s about out!”

“Okay!” Shafi yelled and ran off.