"This is it," Markara says as she applies the brakes to her Toyota and points to a plain, wood-framed building with the words "Islamic Center & Mosque" in large embossed letters on the side. I crane my neck to gaze at the roofline. No minarets. One fantasy dashed. A small cupola with a loudspeaker adorns the otherwise residential looking one-story structure. Several bearded, olive-skinned men congregating in front of the mosque notice me gawking and respond with furrowed brows. I slink down in my seat.

Markara passes up the empty parking spaces in front of the building and drives through a gate into an unpaved side lot. She pulls past all the cars and parks at the far end, out of sight of the front doors. *People don't sneak into church,* I muse. *But this isn't church,* I remind myself. I swallow hard and try to relax. Thoughts of the vision resurface for the third time that day. The vision of the Arabs happened years ago, but remembering it gives me a sense of purpose on my first visit to a mosque.

As we step onto the hard packed dirt, the hot, humid air of the early summer evening closes around us. I fight an urge to loosen my tie and take off my suit jacket, but Markara pulls a scarf from her purse and puts it on her head.

"It is our custom for women to cover their heads while in the mosque," she says.

"I understand."

But I don't understand her distant, apologetic tone and near silence. She has said few words since picking me up at the motel. What happened to the confident, outgoing person I met on the plane eight weeks earlier? I shared some of my most cherished ideas with her. She reciprocated enthusiasm about my investigations into the psychology of some of Islam's most venerable tenets, and invited me to speak at her mosque. I want that person with me.

I try to center myself in the moment by observing the oak trees that line the compound. Through the low branches and chain link fence beyond them, I make out small disheveled houses

sitting amid cluttered, unkempt lawns. The palpable abject poverty only heightens a sense of foreboding.

"I asked Dr. Ramejaddin to meet us outside," Markara says as we near the corner of the building. "He will show you where to go. It is not proper for a woman to accompany a man into the mosque, especially an unmarried woman. Is that okay?"

"Sure, that's fine."

That explains her solemn mood and discreet arrival. My Egyptian friend needs to avoid appearances of impropriety. I feel a twinge of guilt, but shake it off. I don't want to worry about how things look. I want to recapture my confidence. In order to deliver a cogent speech I need self-assurance, not proper appearances.

Dr. Ramejaddin awaits us at the end of the walkway leading to the mosque. After introducing me, Markara slips into the mosque, leaving me alone with my host, a tall, trim, professorial-looking man, dressed in a dark wool suit and sporting a neatly groomed grey beard. We exchange pleasantries before he says, "We will be holding a service in the prayer hall first. Then we will move to the social hall for your talk."

We enter the air-conditioned building where about a dozen men congregate in the foyer. Heads turn to watch me, the only Caucasian present. When several return my nod and smile, I feel my anxiety ease a bit.

We pass through the foyer to a small room that contains a large sink-like trough with a number of spigots.

"The faithful have a tradition of washing hands before a service, as a cleansing ritual," he explains as performs the task under one of the spigots. I join him at an adjacent spot. I have an odd feeling, as though I am prepping for an operation. *Will I have to deliver my speech with the precision of a surgeon?*

We then head to the prayer hall, a spacious meeting room devoid of all furniture except a single chair half-way down on the right side. A waist-high divider cordons off the left side of the room in the back, enclosing perhaps one fifth of the space.

"There is a chair for you to sit in during prayers," he says to me in a hushed tone and gestures toward the chair before leaving me with my trepidations.

The room, empty at first, soon fills with men. A mosaic of bold, dark colors and intricate woven patterns fills the hall as each man unfolds his prayer rug onto the plain grey carpet. As they sit down some throw a brief, sideways glance my way. Every questioning look triggers a nervous smile from me, as I sit with my hands folded in my lap. Finally, the imam walks to the front of the room and rolls out his prayer rug. Coincident with his appearance, women enter through a back entrance into the partitioned area. The rustle of their movement catches my attention, but I suppress a desire for a backward glance.

The imam offers a number of resonant prayers while the men kneel on their rugs, heads pressed to the floor. Occasionally the congregation gives a response. I see no printed order of service, yet everyone knows what to say, and when to say it.

The thirty minutes of prayers affords me plenty of time to think about my peculiar circumstance. As I do, I grow calmer in the reverent atmosphere. I know that a non-believer rarely attends a service at a mosque, let alone gives the main address at Friday prayers, the most important service of the week, but I feel that I belong in this position. A sense of destiny allays my apprehensions. *You don't meet a stranger on a plane and get asked to speak at her mosque without the help of fate*, an inner voice says. My ideas captivated my fellow passenger on that forty minute flight from Cleveland to Detroit. How could a non-believing man elicit such an invitation from an Islamic faithful, a woman at that? I'm sure many in the room would ask that question, if they knew the circumstances of how I got there.

After the prayer service concludes, my mind feels clear, as though scrubbed clean by the sounds that echoed in the worship hall for the past half hour. The men arise in silence and roll up their prayer rugs, as the women file out the back exit without a word. I sit, absorbed in stillness until Dr. Ramejaddin comes to escort me to the social hall.

The social hall, with its lower ceiling and smaller floor space has a more intimate feeling than the formal setting of the prayer hall. I wait in the front of the room, while the men filter in and sit on the carpeted floor. The women don't enter the room, but a group of them gather just outside the double door entrance. Their many scarf-covered heads bob back and forth as they jockey for a good view through the doorway. Once everyone settles into position, a sense of silent expectancy fills the room. Then Dr. Ramejaddin comes to the front and speaks.

"Tonight we are fortunate to have Dr. Brian McPherson here to speak to us. Dr. McPherson is a psychologist who has studied the sounds of human languages and their emotional impact. He has done some fascinating work investigating the sounds we speak and know as the names of Allah that he would like to share with us. Please welcome Dr. McPherson."

The men give a polite round of applause.

"Thank you for inviting me to speak tonight. It is an honor for me to be here."

I pause to center myself. I have not prepared a text, and have not rehearsed what I will say. Experience has taught me to speak from the heart.

"I first became interested in how speech sounds have an emotional impact almost twenty years ago when I attended a yoga retreat that included chanting. The chanting induced such an uplifting experience that I wanted to understand how it occurred. I knew that the effect didn't come from the meaning of the words, since I didn't understand any of the Sanskrit or Hindi words I used.

"In the weeks following the retreat I studied sounds several hours each evening after work, trying to fathom how each sound affected my emotions. One day as I closed my eyes and sat back to take a break from this endeavor, I saw a vision of three Arabs sitting cross-legged and staring at something in their midst. At first it looked like a roulette wheel had captivated their attention, but as my awareness focused on the object, it turned into an exquisite crystal. The next day my wife brought me a book that 'jumped off the shelf' at her. The book, written by a Sufi, proposed that different sounds held different emotional values. It used some of the ninety-nine names of Allah as examples.

"Over time I learned the reason for three people in the vision and why the game of chance became a stunning crystal. There turns out to be three vowels common to all languages, and three physiological dimensions of emotions. Vowels, consonants, and emotional dimensions do not randomly tumble around unrelated, as one would suppose from everyday use, but rather upon close inspection one sees that they combine together into a unified arrangement, which one could compare to a beautiful crystalline structure."

As I continue to talk about the expressive values of individual sounds that my research has uncovered, my words spill out with ease and comfort. Comfort, that is, until the front door of the mosque bursts open with a crash. Footsteps striking the tiles in the foyer reverberate in the social hall before someone pushes their way past the women in the doorway. I stop in mid-sentence. The latecomer strides halfway toward where I stand, and stops.

"Why are you listening to this infidel?" The words come from a stocky man wearing jeans, who looks to be in his early thirties and of Arab descent. The strident voice continues, "You should not let a Christian infidel speak to you in our place of worship. It is a disgrace to Islam."

After a brief silence, a man seated near the front addresses the intruder. "Who are you?"

"Yes, what are you doing here?" adds another.

"I am from Southfield. When I heard that a Christian infidel was to speak here tonight I felt that someone must put a stop to it."

"Be quiet. We want to hear what this man has to say," says a third seated men.

"You should not be listening to him," the angry man replies.

"Sit down and be quiet."

"Yes, sit down." A chorus of voices fills the room.

"No!" the new arrival protests. "You should not let a Christian infidel speak to you in our place of worship. It is a disgrace to Islam!"

"Why do you think we should not listen to a Christian?" someone asks.

"The Qur'an says we should defend Islam from infidels. Why do you not stand with me?"

"The prophet, peace be unto him, has said that we can learn from non-believers. This person came here from out of state on his own time and money to talk to us about what his scientific studies show about Islam. Let him speak." Dr. Ramejaddin's voice rises at the end.

Silence. The malcontent doesn't go against the opinion of the prophet and the authority of Dr. Ramejaddin, but gives a scowl before turning and sitting down against a side wall. I resume my talk, but only get in two sentences before the man interrupts.

"This person is not one of us. We should not be listening to him."

Finally, I reach my limit of tolerance. "If you would just listen, you would see that what I am saying is very supportive of Islam," I say, with a definite edge to my voice.

"Yes, just be quiet."

"Be quiet."

The would-be savior of the faith sits with a sullen look, but says nothing more.

This leaves me free to continue talking about associations between human emotions and components of speech, and to relate the evidence to the names of Allah with several examples. I do this with the hope that methods of science and creeds of Islam find peace together in the hearts and minds of those present.

After I conclude and answer a few questions, they serve refreshments. As we sit on the floor and eat pizza, an older man addresses me in a soft-spoken voice.

"I enjoyed your talk very much."

"Thank you."

"You have come a long way to be here?"

"Yes. I live in Pennsylvania," I say. "My work takes me all over the United States. I usually go home to Pennsylvania on the weekends, but I chose to come here to talk to you instead."

"This must be very important to you for you to do that," he says.

I nod, but don't say anything.

The man continues after a few moments. "Why don't you become a Muslim?" His entreaty is soft, not challenging.

I cock my head to one side and rub my chin. "I don't know. I have thought about that, but I have felt that it would be hard for my family to accept it. Also I think that my work on the names of Allah may be more widely accepted if it is seen as coming from a non-Muslim." I don't tell him the most important reason why I am not a Muslim, why I can't submit to Allah. How can I explain that, after attributing scientific significance to the names of Allah, I am not a theist, that I don't accept the concept of God as meaningful? I keep to myself my belief that the names of Allah, just like my vision, came through what I can best describe as the collective unconscious.

After more polite chatter the event winds down and I walk back to the car with Markara.

"You were very smart to start your talk with the story of your vision," Markara tells me once in the car. "Most Muslims place importance on such happenings, more so than a typical westerner."

I don't reply, but consider to myself, *that's exactly why I have never shared my vision with my scientific colleagues.* On the trip back to the hotel I don't say much. I feel calm and relaxed, fulfilled. At the hotel we both get out of the car and stand in the muggy Michigan night under the lights of the hotel parking lot.

"Thank you so much for doing this," she says. "It means very much to me to see a non-believer with your credentials show respect to Islam. It has renewed my own faith."

"It was my pleasure."

"You must keep in touch and email anything further that you have in your work on the names of Allah."

"I will."

"Thanks again," she says as she holds out her hand.

I don't take her hand, but instead hold open my arms. "Give me a hug."

She hesitates, her culture's taboo on contact between unmarried men and women evident.

"You are like a sister to me."

Her lips form a smile that warms my heart as she accepts my embrace. Then we say good-bye.