



The Unexpected Kingdom

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Yasmina, a young Filipina nurse from the western part of Mindanao, felt a knot of fear tighten in her stomach as the plane descended into Jeddah. Her preconceived notions of Saudi Arabia – a land of rapists, nomads, poor hygiene, and harsh punishments – painted a grim picture in her mind. Images of veiled women, subservient wives, and a culture dominated by men filled her thoughts. The reality, however, began to unfold as a stark contrast to her expectations.

The first thing that struck her was the sheer modernity of Jeddah. Towering skyscrapers pierced the sky, long, well-lit roads stretched into the distance their lights like scattered fireflies, marking the way, and the city pulsed with a surprising vibrancy. People were respectful and surprisingly caring, their interactions marked by a peculiar gentleness in a peculiar way. The deep-seated love for Islam was palpable, evident in the solemn prayer five times a day and the overflowing streets of Makkah during Hajj, a breathtaking spectacle of faith. The man-made islands and the world's tallest fountain, rising majestically from the Red Sea, were testaments to human ingenuity and ambition. The unexpected diversity of the landscape – from lush fruit orchards and vibrant flower markets to the harsh beauty of sandstorms and even the occasional hail – further challenged her initial perceptions.

The markets were a sensory explosion. The old city's labyrinthine streets, draped in the rich colors of silks, carpets, and spices, offered a captivating contrast to the bustling modernity of new Jeddah. The aroma of incense and perfumes mingled with the earthy scent of spices, while glittering gems and gold seemed to shimmer like curtains hanging from the rooftops. New Jeddah, in contrast, teemed with modern conveniences: restaurants, fast-food chains, boutiques selling elaborately embroidered clothes and shoes, and furniture stores showcasing majestic designs.

At King Fahd Medical Hospital, a marvel of modern architecture and technology, Yasmina found her professional niche. The state-of-the-art facilities and the camaraderie with her Filipino and international colleagues provided a comforting familiarity. But it was her exceptional nursing skills that truly set her apart. Her dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment to patient care earned her the respect and admiration of her bosses, colleagues, and patients alike.

One particular instance stands out. Yasmina tirelessly cared for an elderly woman battling a severe illness. Through her devoted attention, the patient recovered, her gratitude expressed in a heartfelt gesture – a kiss on Yasmina's eyes and hands. This simple act of appreciation solidified Yasmina's understanding of the unexpected kingdom she had found – a land of stark contrasts, but ultimately, a place of surprising beauty, warmth, and profound human connection.





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