

# VEILS

By

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# VEILS

**CAST:** Intisar and Samar are college roommates, living in a dorm at the American Egyptian University (AEU), Egypt.

Intisar - Female, African American Muslim, 20-23 years old, wears a veil (hijab) that is wrapped snugly around her head covering her hair but not her face. "Inti" is a strong-willed, intelligent, passionate young woman who is doing a year abroad at the American Egyptian University, a Middle-Eastern/Religious Studies major.

Samar - Female, Egyptian Muslim, 20-23 years old, does not wear a veil. Samar dresses in chic, western clothes, modestly dressed when she goes out, not so modest at home or among friends. She often wears a NY Yankees baseball hat. She is also a student at AEU, studying journalism. Well off, cosmopolitan, speaks Arabic, French and English. Friendly, outgoing.

**SETTING:** Cairo, Egypt. Various set location/playing areas are simply portrayed, including university dorm room, school editing room, hotel room.

**TIME:** Pre "Arab Spring", circa 2010

**HISTORICAL ACCURACY:** VEILS is in no way meant to be an exact or even approximate historical account of events leading up to the recent Egyptian revolution. For dramatic purposes, historic timelines have been changed and compressed. The play is a fictional account of two totally fictional young women struggling to find their footing in a world exploding around them. This is a fictional story not a history.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Intisar, a veiled, African-American Muslim student, thought she might finally fit in when she enrolled for a year abroad at the American Egyptian University in Cairo. However, the Arab Spring soon explodes across the Middle-East, threatening to overwhelm the young American woman and her liberal Egyptian roommate, Samar. In the struggle to find their footing in this political storm, the young women instead find themselves on opposite sides of a bitter and dangerous cultural divide.

# VEILS

(Ten page sample)

## SCENE SEVEN

(Lights up on dorm room. The door bursts open, a figure wearing a head-to-toe, black niqab, rushes in. The figure strips the niqab off, revealing Intisar. She is upset, sweaty, bleeding from a cut on her face. She throws niqab down, feels her face, sees blood.)

INTISAR

Dang!

(She grabs some tissues and presses them against her forehead, pulls tissues away and sees more blood...)

Dang!!!

(She pats her face some more, applying pressure, until bleeding seems to stop. Samar rushes in, flustered, dirty but exhilarated, bursting with excitement!)

SAMAR

Inti! Il ham du lilah. Where were you?! Oh my god, I was so worried!

(Samar tries to give her a hug.)

INTISAR

(Inti fends Samar off)

No!

SAMAR

Did you see what happened?! The riot?! I looked for you on the steps. I called, I texted. Where were you?!

INTISAR

Oh, I was there.

SAMAR

Oh my god! It was a crazy house! I almost got arrested! Look at me. My jeans! They pushed me down in the street. Everyone running. The police hitting people with om-see, with clubs. Two police tried to take my mobile! I got their pictures. Police brutality! Maybe I can sell these to CNN!

(Looking at photos on cell)

SAMAR (Cont)

Did you get any photos? My god, look at this! Some of those men were like dogs with foaming mouths! Maganeen awee, awee!

(Tries to show Inti the photos)

One of the black crows near me was kicking people. Probably the same one who pulled my hair!

INTISAR

Maybe they deserved kicking.

SAMAR

Eh?

INTISAR

I don't get you.

SAMAR

What?

INTISAR

How could you join a mob like that?

SAMAR

What are you saying?

INTISAR

I saw you. You, Dahlia, Tarek. Out in the square. Jumping around, screaming with everyone else. This was sposed to be about veils.

SAMAR

It changed. Something changed. Suddenly, yanni, it was crazy.

INTISAR

You're dang right something changed. One minute I think I'm doing something for women and the next I'm getting pieces of pavement chucked at me!

SAMAR

It was those fanatics from the mosques, that started throwing stones. Your friend the sheikh and his buddies. Shouting against the school, against America.

INTISAR

Did you throw a stone?

SAMAR

Me?

INTISAR

I got hit with a stone.

(Shows bloody tissue)

Did you throw one?

SAMAR

Oh my God! Inti, you're hurt?

(Tries to get close to Inti, who fends her off.)

INTISAR

Hands off! I saw Tarek throwing stones. Did you throw a stone?

SAMAR

Are you ok? Let me see...

INTISAR

Did you throw a stone?

SAMAR

Ok, yes. I threw a stone. But not at you! I never even saw you!

INTISAR

No?

SAMAR

Everyone was throwing stones!

INTISAR

Not the New York Times reporters, I bet. Hard to see both sides when you've got a rock in your hand!

SAMAR

I was just so angry from these fanatics trying to put their rules on us. I told you! These foreigners. When does it stop?! We must say khalass, enough!

INTISAR

We must say enough? Ok, then. Khalass! I've had enough!

(Inti pulls a suitcase from under the bed,  
starts packing.)

SAMAR

What are you doing?

INTISAR

You want to protest, get down girl. You want to be all hate the world, fine. Just don't claim you're against all this American violence, Ms. Gandhi, then smack somebody upside the head with a rock.

SAMAR

I didn't!

INTISAR

Foreigners out of the Middle-East? Well, chalk it girl.

SAMAR

What?

INTISAR

This American's going home.

SAMAR

No! Mish mumkin! How can you go?!

INTISAR

Easy. Go to the airport, get on a plane.

SAMAR

What about school? Your classes?

INTISAR

I'd rather live.

SAMAR

You can't go!

INTISAR

Watch me.

SAMAR

La', I won't watch you...

(Samar grabs clothes from Inti's hands, sits on them.)

I won't let you go.

INTISAR

Hey!

SAMAR

I'm sorry you are hurt. I'm sorry I threw a stone. But don't run from Egypt.

INTISAR

I'm not running.

(Picks up the niqab and tosses it at Samar.)  
Here..something to remember me by.

SAMAR

What is this?

INTISAR

What does it look like?

SAMAR

Where did you get this?

INTISAR

I bought it.

SAMAR

No. No way. You will wear this?

INTISAR

Past tense.

SAMAR

What?

INTISAR

I wore it. Today. You saw me.

SAMAR

La'. I never saw you.

INTISAR

Well, I saw you! And you might want to be careful, it's got spit on it.

SAMAR

(Realizing) You wore this at school?

INTISAR

It's not right...

SAMAR

At the protest?

INTISAR

..that they should be banned.

SAMAR

No Inti, this is not right. This is leading to Sharia law..to..to women treated like sheep, like goats.

INTISAR

Were those women in a goat pen? They're going to university. What business is it of AEU or anybody what they wear to do it?!

SAMAR

Inti, you don't know. You are not from here.

INTISAR

Right, now Inti can't understand cause she's a dumb foreigner. I guess that's why people spit on me.

SAMAR

This is wrong.

INTISAR

This is Tarek!

SAMAR

What?

INTISAR

Your cousin.

SAMAR

No, no, no, Tarek wouldn't do this.

INTISAR

Oh, just like you didn't throw a stone?

SAMAR

I'm sorry!

INTISAR

Samar, he was grabbing the women that were protesting. Tarek and that jerk Hassan. Grabbing their asses through the robes.

SAMAR

This is not right.



INTISAR

Laughing! I shoved Tarek away and he spit on me. I tried to kick him and the guards pulled me off.

SAMAR

This was you?

INTISAR

This was me, just before I got the rock upside my head.

SAMAR

Ana asfa giddan, giddan, giddan. I'm sorry.

INTISAR

You should be.

SAMAR

Yes, rocks are wrong. Spitting is wrong. But Inti, you are also wrong. What did you expect? You come to Egypt and wear this thing. Why? I don't understand. To insult us? To teach us a lesson?

INTISAR

No!

SAMAR

I think if they said in America that you must wear this, you would not.

INTISAR

It's just as bad to say you can't wear something as it is to say you must wear something.

SAMAR

Why do Americans all come to this country with an agenda to improve us. To fix us.

INTISAR

What are you talking about?

SAMAR

You think you can come, and in one day, fix things! Like your government, always telling us what to do. Egypt is different than America. We do not want to be like you. You must accept this.

INTISAR

I do!

SAMAR

My fourteen year old niece is putting on the veil now. Not for religion. Not for politics. Just because all her friends wear it. She says this is "cool" now.

INTISAR

So?!

SAMAR

I saw her the other day wearing a playboy t-shirt and a headscarf. You see? She doesn't understand, she just follows. Just like you today!

INTISAR

So you too? You think I'm some kind of wanna-be Muslim that needs to have Islam explained to me.

SAMAR

I don't think that.

INTISAR

I didn't come here thinking it was gonna be my little Muslima paradise.

SAMAR

Inti, wait...

INTISAR

My whole life I've had to walk around with people looking at my skin, at my veil. Looking at me like I'm a second class citizen. And then to come here and be looked at like a second class Muslim! It's too much. It's just too much!

SAMAR

You know I am not like this!

(Samar puts her hand on Inti's arm, Inti pulls away.)

INTISAR

Just forget it, ok? Get on a plane, it won't matter.

SAMAR

If you leave now, yanni, I think we, you and I, will be sad for many years and Tarek learns nothing. Why do that?

(Touches her arm again...)

INTISAR

Hands..Off! Don't you understand english? Im-shee, girl, im-shee!!

SAMAR

Oh...(insulted, hurt)...Oh.

(Inti continues to pack. Pause.)

You know why I requested an American roommate?

INTISAR

Target practice?

SAMAR

I wanted to reach across this gulf between our countries. Peace and love on this planet, right?

INTISAR

Nice try.

SAMAR

The funny thing is that I imagined that you would reach back.

INTISAR

And when I requested a Muslim roommate, I imagined I'd get a Muslim.

SAMAR

Ah. Taban. Of course, here is the real problem. You think I am the bad Muslim.

INTISAR

Being Muslim is about submitting to God, not Coco Locos.

SAMAR

Americans are always right, mish kida? Better than everyone else. Now you are even the best Muslims. Who knew?

INTISAR

Right. Fine. No worries, I'm out of here.

SAMAR

Yes, and here is another American thing, when there is a problem, turn your back and fly away.

INTISAR

Excuse me?!

SAMAR

Ok, khalass. Enough. I am the one who goes! You need to stay and teach us poor Egyptians some more about Islam. But when you are the famous American muezzin, standing up in your tower, looking down on everyone, I want to know who you will be calling? All of us or just those who believe like you?

(Samar leaves. Inti keeps packing. Lights fade as the call to prayer is heard from outside which rises as more and more mosques join in.)

**END OF SCENE SEVEN**

**(Skip to Scene Nine)**

**SCENE NINE**

(Lights change, editing room. Call to prayer softly in background. Intisar in front of the camera, Samar filming. We also see Inti on the screen. This is not bitter, it is an opening of the heart.)

INTISAR

I want to answer a few questions about this, my veil, my hijab. No, it is not hot. No, my father doesn't make me wear it. No, I don't wear it in the shower. And no, I am not oppressed.

9/11, 2001, right? My mother..was forced to strip to her underwear in the back room of an airport. I was thirteen and we were flying home from my aunt's wedding. Halfway there our plane was diverted to a small airport. Nobody knew what was happening. We didn't know of the hijackings or that all flights were being grounded. We were on the runway for more than an hour when airport security came on the plane. Searching, apparently, for anybody who looked dangerous and proceeded to escort my Mother and me onto the tarmac, everybody staring. In a back room full of security, they had our suitcases open, belongings strewn all over, and my mother was requested to submit to a body search. When she refused, the requests became uglier, strip or be arrested. She looked at me, afraid, tears running down my face, and she took her clothes off. Of course they found nothing. What was there to find? They looked at me and she said "You will NOT undress my daughter." They didn't but they made me take my veil off. Why is that?

It was my first veil. When a girl reaches puberty. Delicate, light blue. Like the sky we had been flying through. A proud moment. Becoming a woman. A rite of passage. I hadn't had it a month and a person of supposed authority forced me take it off. Rag-head.

Later I sat crying next to my mother as we waited for my father to drive 400 miles to rescue us. She said "Why are you crying?" "Shame." "Daughter..another person can not inflict shame on you. Only you can inflict shame on your self. When those men looked at my body, my naked skin, they were the ones who felt shame. Because God was not in their hearts. Keep God strong in your heart and you will never feel shame."

They kept asking my mother where we were from. Like we weren't American. Like we were foreigners. She would say "Overbrook Park". "Where is that?" "Philadelphia." And they would look at her like she was making a joke. What was she supposed to say? Africa? Fula? Futa Toro? Where my great, great, great grandmother was stolen out of her bed, raped, and dragged to America in chains? And the first thing they did, when she got to the Land of the Free, was strip her naked and put her on the auction block...she wasn't hiding anything either.

The right to wear clothes, to cover yourself, is important to my family. This veil connects me to my God, to my family, and to our history of struggle. When I put on this veil, I know who I am. There is a simplicity. A clarity. I know who I am and who I want to be. This veil is not hiding away. For me it is a release. Without it I feel naked. I am naked.

"Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms."

That seems pretty clear to me. God says wear a veil, you do it, right? I believe in this. I am strong in my heart and I'm not hiding anything.

(Lights down)

END SCENE NINE

**(End of 10 page sample)**