

Excerpt from the chapter “The Ghost Camels of Amal”:

The stranger was still arguing with himself when he arrived at the base of Mount Amal. “I’m not really going to do this, am I?” But something kept edging him on. Finally, he took his blanket roll, a flask of water, a crust of bread, and a piece of camel jerky from his pack. He then began toiling up the steep cliff.

The mountain peak was just as the old muzein had described. The stranger curled up in his blanket, directly on the flat rock. The hard punch of wind gusts made the man feel like an unwelcome guest. The mists from the rain were already traveling up the mountain from the sun-heated sands below. As the man chewed morsels of bread and jerky, the ghost camels began to form. Soon the camels were smiling and making a mysterious *circumnavigation around the mountain —like the journey made around the *Ka’bah. The man watched the camels closely as the wind whispered: “...the Manifest, the Aware, the Great, the Responsive, the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing,....” As the camels traveled faster, the whispers blended into one sound, one sonnet, one prayer of nature.

At last the unhappy man saw a sparkle from a distant camel. As the camel came nearer, the man could clearly see that it was grinning. The man stood on the edge of the flat rock. He was trembling with fear. When the grinning, ghost camel was directly beneath him, the man hurled himself over the edge of the rock.

The man was moving in mid-air. The clouds were so thick that he couldn’t see beyond them. He didn’t even realize that his cloak had gotten hung on a thorny limb jutting from the cliff. The gusty wind bouncing his body made him feel as if he were moving. His cloak billowed like a balloon as it hugged the upward-moving wind. The man thought that he was encircling the mountain on the back of the grinning ghost camel.

“Tell me the hundredth name,” demanded the man. But there was no sound but the haunting, mysterious orchestra of whispering winds. “I demand to know the hundredth name!”

Within the sound of the orchestra, names were echoed: “...the Creator, the Giver of Life, the Giver of Death, the Resurrecter....” But the hundredth name could not be heard.

