My GrandMother washes her feet in the sink of bathroom at Seans

Deep Dive, Unite/See

Mohja Kahf’s poem “My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears” has an incredibly straightforward title. It’s about a rather singular experience of the poet’s, in which her grandmother washed her feet in a sink. Despite how interesting that is, what stood out most to me is the poem’s ending lines, and the message they portray.

In this poem, Kahf describes a conflict between her grandmother and some disapproving patrons of the store, who do not understand why she would do such a thing as to wash her feet in a sink that others use for their hands. To this end, these patrons wish to stop Kahf’s grandmother and ask Kahf to relay their message to the non-English speaker. But this clash of cultures is quickly defused by Kahf, who opens the door and leads the two conflicting groups out of the restroom and back into Sears.

It’s here where the final lines come into play, and they are as follows: “(…) we all emerge on the sales floor / and lose ourselves in the great common ground / of housewares on markdown.” What was once a brewing battle of cultures dissolved in an instant, leaving the two involved parties to their own business. I find these last few lines to be rather profound, and exemplary of how people can set apart their differences in favor of a common ideal or goal. Kahf’s grandmother and the upset shoppers agree to part ways and continue shopping, because they can agree on how important shopping is.

Based on Kahf’s description of these two unsuspecting shoppers who witnessed her grandmother’s bath, I can infer that they are probably pretty closed-minded. Since they were more willing to condemn the grandmother’s actions than ask about them, I believe this is a fair inference. But despite their ignorance of other cultures, these two shoppers can still agree with her and Kahf on the value of shopping. This points to the heart of Kahf’s poem, and the true message behind it.

As outraged as these patrons got at Kahf’s grandmother’s actions, they were willing to forget relatively quickly and return to shopping. The same goes for Kahf’s grandmother, who felt offended by the fact that they would disturb a sacred rite of prayer simply because it was unorthodox. Despite the evident differences in their beliefs, everyone was able to continue on without further conflict. This speaks to a message of unity, and of respecting others. Both of the involved parties could agree on the value of shopping and bargain-hunting, showing that they were not so foreign to one another after all. This idea can and should be applied further; just because other people might seem different from you doesn’t mean that they are, or that you should look down on them. Treat others with respect, and get to know people before you make wrongful assumptions about them.

Racial Issues:  
The racial issues that occur since the tragedy of 9/11 thirteen years ago has actually intrigued the Arab-American poets, novelists, and other writers to do something in order to stop and fight the ongoing stereotype. They conveyed what they were thinking and opposed through word by word. They also showed their objections of how white people treated and discriminated them nearly like the way African Americans had experienced back then. Like African Americans, Arab Americans also wanted to stop and abolish the racial discrimination in America. My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears is a poem that was written by Mohja Kahf in her book titled E-mails from Scheherazad. Mohja Kahf was born in Damascus, Syria. In 1971, her family decided to move to the United States. She was still 4 years old when she moved to the United States and grew up in the Midwest. Mohja Kahf is a professor of English at the University of Arkansas. She obtained a PhD in comparative literature from Rutgers University and is the author of the poetry collection Emails from Scheherazad (2003) and the novel The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf (2006) which talks about the hardships of immigration that the Arab Americans faced during that time. Because of the simplicity of the poem, at first I did not think that the poem would be so deep and full of emotions. It is also very sensitive because it is strongly related to races and religion. The poem is based on the poet’s experience. She probably would never think that this unpleasant experience happened to her and her grandmother. This story took place at Sears, a department store in America. Since Muslims are required to do prayer five times a day, her grandmother did not want to miss it so she wanted to do the prayer at Sears. Before doing the prayer, they had to do wudhu, which is a ritual washing. Her grandmother did wudhu in the sink of the restroom and put her feet in the sink. This was witnessed by the female employees who work at Sears. They stared unpleasantly and frown at her grandmother, thinking that it was a bad and inappropriate manner she had. The female employees, who could not stand of what the poet’s grandmother did, told the poet with resentment that her grandmother could not do that. Of course, she and her grandmother was offended by the way these women’s attitude toward them. Even though her grandmother did not speak English, she knew that these female employees were not fond of her. She asked the poet to explain to them what she was actually doing. At the end, the poet just smiled at the employees as if her grandmother actually said something nice to them and acted like the employees had apologized to her grandmother through her. As we can see, there was a misconception between the employees and the grandmother. I understand that maybe most of the Americans are not familiar with wudhu and that ablution places are rare in America. The poet wants to give knowledge through this poem to the Americans about Muslims obligation to pray and suggests that there should be an alternative to avoid this kind of misunderstanding in the future since some of the Americans tend to be sensitive toward the Arab Americans since the tragedy of 9/11.