



A friendship through the ages

MAHERA AIMAN NOOR

Old Town, Alexandria
July 1990

Kavya was on one of her more childish endeavours when she first met her.

Having just moved to Egypt, Kavya still had the curiosity of a tourist in her. And one of the things that tugged at her was the Library of Alexandria. She had first heard its name as a string of pretty words in her grandma's stories that she did not understand. But she now did. To her it was a place of stories, and she desperately wanted to visit it. She was only twelve and at this age it was hard to ignore things that tugged at the mind, no matter if it didn't quite exist.

Kavya went on a hunt to find the land on which her beloved library once stood, and her heart brought her to Old Town. And as she stood in one of its alleyways, watching from the shadows, she thought it was the most beautiful place she had ever seen. Its colourful houses, cobblestone paths, dainty shops, and art galleries made Kavya feel as if she was in a fairy tale. To her, it was as if Old Town contained magic itself.

She was skipping across the sidewalks when she felt a pair of eyes on her. She turned and saw a girl, no older than herself, staring at her. For a moment Kavya was so embarrassed about being caught doing something so silly, that she didn't even register the girl's odd colouring. Blond hair and blue eyes. A foreigner then, like Kavya. But she was clearly lost,

unlike Kavya.

Kavya, always ready to play the hero, decided to help her find her home. She took the girl's hand and asked, "What's your name?"

The girl eyed their joined hands for a moment. Then answered.

"Clara."

Kavya's home, Cairo
March 1994

Forgoing innocent but impossible dreams was one of the inevitable consequences of growing up. But Kavya found it harder than most. There was a time when her head was full of magic, heroes and dreams of becoming something. That something would take different forms every day; a dancer, a cartographer, or even a pianist. But recently intrusions by reality had become common affair, and reality was never pleasant. Reality took the form of disappointments and failure.

Coming to terms with it was hard, but achievable, for reality was where she saw Cairo during a sunset and heard Clara when she was laughing. Kavya no longer believed in any sort of magic except the one that caused her to meet Clara in Old Town all those years ago. Clara, around whom laughing felt almost atavistic.

She was lying next to her now, on the floor of her perpetually messy room. Kavya and Clara looked out the window as the sun set, and not for the first-time awe filled them. A sky of fire and sandy squares and domes that fell under the shadow of spires that rose up to reach the sky. Distantly they could see the pyramids,

standing tall and proud through time itself.

The city of a thousand minarets—and her home. Reality held her home.

Cairo Airport, Cairo
August 1996

Kavya had never understood the concept of *never*, not fully at least. She understood that the sun could never rise from the west, or that math would never make any sense to her. But she had not understood the fear people had of 'never'. The fear of death, which really was a fear of never living again. The fear of goodbyes. The finality in the word eluded her. But as she left Cairo and Clara, possibly forever, she began to understand and fear a fraction of it.

"We will talk every day," Clara said, hugging Kavya.

"We will," she promised, fiercely hugging back.

Kavya walked away without looking back. There was no need to. She would see her again.

Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia
September 1998

Time erased and blurred everything, and for Kavya, it was easier to forget than to remember. It was not long before the sharp pain of losing home and Clara dimmed to shallow pangs of faded nostalgia in her mind. And it was not long before the calls that came everyday slowly stopped coming altogether. It should have hurt. She should have cared.

But there was only the pale feeling of uneasiness, until that too disappeared. Promises were much easier made than kept.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria
October 2002

It had been four years since she had last seen Clara and had not expected to now as she returned to Alexandria for the winter. But it was a good surprise and Kavya was grateful. Clara looked just as familiar as she felt distant. And that distance was what caused Kavya to not be able to call out to her until she had followed her half way across the city.

When they arrived at Old Town, it felt just like the rest of Egypt had, unfamiliar, nostalgic, but so obviously home. Egypt would always be home, just as Nova Scotia was home.

"Hey," she said, finally dredging up the courage to call out to Clara.

"Kavya?" She asked, more out of amazement than confusion.

Kavya grinned, and the awkwardness between them lessened. They made small talk and rediscovered what made them laugh. But there was a distance, and there always would be a distance between them now. Yet it brought Kavya no sorrow. They had been apart long enough for Kavya to only have happy, faded memories of them together. A time she had cherished but had long since put behind her.

But just as Egypt would always be her home, Clara would always be her friend.

The stars seemed to shine brighter as two friends walked hand in hand, laughing and chatting away, as they first had a decade ago.

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