

# Alice-Miranda in Egypt

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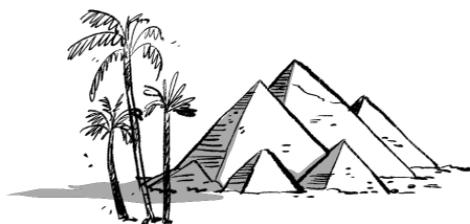
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# Prologue



The boy pressed his ear to the door and willed his heart to stop beating so loudly. His mother had banished him to his room an hour ago for asking too many questions, but now his father was home with answers.

‘Akil, please tell me, what did they say?’ he heard his mother’s voice.

There was a long pause.

‘Masud’s blood is not a match,’ his father replied.

For a moment the world was silent – the house was still – and then his mother let out an agonising cry.

How was this possible after everything the doctors had said? Surely they were wrong. Masud angrily wiped his eyes and flung open the door, charging into the sitting room where his parents stood opposite one another. His mother was shaking, tears streaming down her face.

‘Baba!’ The boy clenched his fists in front of him and ran towards the man. ‘It is a mistake. I know it!’

Akil slowly shook his head. ‘Your brother is in God’s hands – there is nothing more we can do.’

‘No!’ Masud shouted. ‘If it cannot be me then there must be someone else – we just need to find them and then Jabari will be well again.’

Esha Salah’s tears fell to the floor.

Jabari was the baby she never dared hope for after doctors had told her she was unable to bear more children. Somehow he came anyway – a ray of sunshine in all their lives. Seven-year-old Masud had been besotted, and as soon as Jabari could walk the little boy became his big brother’s shadow. For eight years, the pair had been the best of friends

but then Masud began to notice things. Jabari was often covered in bruises, though he was not in the least bit clumsy. He was always cold, even in the height of summer, and he was constantly tired. The diagnosis of leukaemia had been as unexpected as it was shocking.

Esha wiped her eyes and straightened her back. 'I must go to the hospital,' she said to her eldest son. 'Your grandmother has been there all day.'

'I'm coming with you, Mama,' Masud said.

'No,' Esha whispered. 'You must stay here and help your father. There is a group arriving tomorrow.'

Masud stared at the man, his brown eyes aching.

'Please, Baba, can't you take someone else on the tour?' the boy asked. 'I want to be here for Jabari.'

Akil looked tenderly at the boy and clutched the knotted prayer rope that was rarely out of his hand.

'There is no one else, Masud. I need you,' Akil said. 'We must work so that we can pay for your brother's treatment.'

'But Jabari needs better medicine. There is a hospital in Philadelphia in America – they have

the best success rates in the world and there is a special register of donors. There must be a match. I have been doing research,' the boy said.

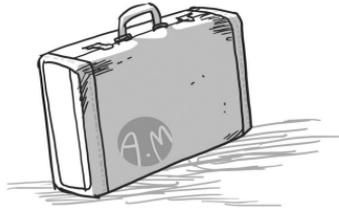
'Stop it, Masud!' his father shouted. 'We cannot afford such things!'

'Then what is the point of working at all,' Masud yelled, 'if there will never be enough money to cure him?'

Esha spun around and glared at her son. 'How dare you speak like that? While there is breath in your brother's lungs we must pray for a miracle.'

'There *are* no miracles, Mama!' Masud yelled. 'What we need is a fortune.' The boy's face crumpled and he ran back to his room.

# Chapter 1



Alice-Miranda zipped the suitcase and hauled it from her bed to the floor.

On the other side of the room, her best friend Millie was grunting and puffing, trying to close the lid of her own luggage – but with a lump like a camel’s hump in the centre she wasn’t having much success. Beads of perspiration peppered the girl’s brow.

‘Would you like some help with that?’ Alice-Miranda asked.

Millie sighed and wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. ‘Yes please! You’d think after all the travelling I’ve done in the past few years I’d have learned a thing or two about packing.’ The girl gave up and slumped onto the bed. ‘But I’m hopeless!’

‘I’ll say,’ another voice replied.

‘Hi Sloane,’ Alice-Miranda said with a smile.

The older girl wandered into the room and sat down on Millie’s desk chair, spinning herself around like a top.

‘Are you already packed?’ Alice-Miranda asked.

‘An hour ago,’ Sloane replied. ‘Caprice is driving me crazy with her non-stop singing. I know she has her exams soon, but I’m really hoping that we don’t have to share a room on this trip – all those trills and runs are getting on my nerves.’

‘At least she has a beautiful voice,’ Alice-Miranda said. ‘It could be worse.’ She opened the lid of Millie’s suitcase and moved the contents onto the bed before rolling all of the clothes tightly and placing them carefully back into the bag like a three-dimensional garment version of Tetris. ‘I’m so excited to visit Egypt. I’ve been reading as much as I can about the Pharaohs and

all of the monuments, and watching videos too, but I'm sure I've only just scratched the surface. The Queen's Colours program has given us some wonderful opportunities – I'm so glad that we all worked hard to get to Gold – it would be horrible if anyone was left behind.'

Millie picked up the guidebook her grandfather had sent her and waved it in the air. 'Don't worry – I have everything we'll need to know and more right here.'

'I love that your grandfather has made the guidebook a tradition between you,' Alice-Miranda said. Millie's bookshelf held a growing number of the tomes for many different countries.

'It's going to be an amazing trip, although the weather might be a bit hot for my liking,' Sloane said.

Jacinta appeared in the doorway, still in her tennis clothes. 'Can you come and pack for me too, Alice-Miranda?'

'Of course.' Alice-Miranda nodded before noticing the anxious look on her friend's face. 'Are you okay?'

'Don't tell me – you've just heard that Lucas isn't coming?' Sloane teased.

‘What?’ Jacinta gasped, her jaw gaping. ‘When did you find that out? What’s happened? He told me this morning he was all set. His mother sent a parcel of new clothes over from New York especially.’

‘I’m just teasing you,’ Sloane said with a grin.

The colour began to return to Jacinta’s cheeks.

‘Well, please don’t. The conversation I just overheard Miss Grimm and Mr Grump having is bad enough,’ Jacinta said.

The other girls looked at their friend expectantly.

Jacinta sat down on Alice-Miranda’s bed, a row of frown lines on her forehead.

Millie stood in front of her, hands on hips. ‘Well, out with it.’

Jacinta shook her head. ‘I shouldn’t say anything. They didn’t know I was there and they were clearly having a *very* serious talk about *very* serious things. I only stayed hidden because I didn’t want them to see me and think I was eavesdropping on purpose.’

‘That’s extremely noble, Jacinta, but you can’t tell half a story then leave us hanging,’ Sloane said. ‘Besides, if you keep it to yourself it sounds like you’re going to be a misery guts. Where were you, anyway?’

‘The toilet in the tennis pavilion. They were right outside,’ Jacinta said. ‘I’m sure they didn’t think anyone was there. Miss Grimm said she’d seen the team leaving with our coach but I had an urgent call of nature and ran back.’

Alice-Miranda bit her lip. ‘If it’s a secret then you shouldn’t tell unless someone is going to get hurt.’

‘It’s worse than that,’ Jacinta said.

‘How?’ Millie asked.

‘If I tell, you have to promise that it stays between us,’ Jacinta said.

The girls nodded.

‘I mean it, you can’t say a word to anyone. Because it’s big, really big – and terrible. Probably the most terrible thing I’ve ever heard.’

‘Come on – enough with the suspense,’ Sloane said, jumping up to shut the door.

Alice-Miranda looked at her friend. ‘You don’t have to say a word if you think it’s the wrong thing to do.’

‘It really doesn’t matter what I think,’ Jacinta said, and sighed deeply. ‘Because unless there’s a miracle, our lovely school is going to be closed by Christmas.’