

THE MAGICAL REALITY OF NADIA

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Chapter One

Nadia did a slow spin in front of her bedroom mirror. The gold glitter on her brand-new Eye of Horus T-shirt sparkled in the afternoon sun.

“What do you think, Amelia?” she said. “Does this outfit say ‘I’m a serious student’ and also ‘I appreciate and understand the importance of fashion’?”

She turned to her bookcase, where her bobbleheads were lined up, and found the Amelia Earhart one. She had always admired Amelia’s style. Nadia bopped Amelia on the head and Amelia began nodding. Or bobbing. Same thing, really.

“It’s official, then!” Nadia said, smiling. “Outfit for the first day of sixth grade—check!” Then she added a fun fact for . . . well, fun. “Did you know that the

very first shopping mall was in ancient Rome?”

While spending the summer with her seriously stylish cousins during her family’s annual trip to the motherland, aka Egypt, Nadia had realized that her fashion game needed a serious overhaul. Throwing on a “My Parents Went to a TED Talk and All I Got Was This Lousy T-shirt” shirt and a pair of leggings just wasn’t going to cut it anymore.

So Nadia tackled fashion the way she did most everything else—with plenty of research. She scoured fashion magazines, blogs, Instagram accounts, and YouTube videos. She read up on classic Egyptian patterns and designs, too, because if she was going to do a style upgrade, she figured it might as well show off how much she loved her culture’s history. Then she and her older cousin Shani went on an amazing shopping spree at the biggest mall in all of Cairo.

And in the middle of learning the difference between midi skirts and maxi skirts, mid-rise jeans and boyfriend jeans, Nadia picked up a lot of fashion facts. Not that she was partial to fashion facts—she loved all facts.

Nadia turned to the mirror once again. Her necklace had gotten tangled in the outfit-trying-on process, and she untwisted the chain. She hadn’t taken the necklace off since she got it several weeks ago at a bazaar in Egypt. She had been wandering through the aisles when

an antique, hippopotamus-shaped amulet caught her eye. (A fun fact had popped up in her brain then: Ancient Egyptians wore hippo amulets to ward off evil.)



Nadia had held the amulet up to take a closer look. “Bekam?” she asked the seller, fully expecting the tourist price. But her Arabic must have been pretty good, because the price was reasonable. Nadia handed over the money and fastened the chain around her neck. It felt *right* to be wearing it. Was it because it reminded her of her faraway family? Her roots in Egypt? Or maybe just because the hippo was totally adorable? She wasn’t sure.

Nadia’s phone beeped.

R u ready to meet up for 🍦?

Ya, she texted back. C u in 10 mins?

It was her best friend, Adam. It was their yearly tradition to go out for a treat at Ice Cream to celebrate the last day of freedom before school started.

Yup. Don’t forget my silverneur!

Silverneur.

Silvoneer.

The present you brought me from Egypt.

Nadia laughed. Adam had many talents, but spelling was definitely not one of them. He was so far off that

even autocorrect couldn't help him. But she could.

Haha, yeah, I'll bring your SOUVENIR 😊

The Egyptian comic book Nadia had brought for him was sitting on her desk, next to a neat pile of brand-new school supplies. Adam was a comic book freak, and she knew he would go crazy for the Egyptian superheroes. (Fun fact: The first Arab comic ever was published in Egypt in 1923. It was called *The Boys*, or *Al-Awlad*.)

Nadia quickly changed back into her shorts and T-shirt, then stuck the comic book in the waistband of her shorts. She dug in her backpack for her wallet.

“See you later, bobble buds,” she said, giving Amelia one last bop. Then she headed downstairs.



Adam was peering into the ice cream display case when Nadia arrived at Ice Scream. She opened the door slowly so the bell wouldn't jangle, then snuck up behind her friend.

“Hurry up and decide, I haven't got all day,” she said in a gruff voice.

Adam spun around with a frown on his face, then laughed when he saw who it was.

“Nadia!” he said. He gave her a big hug.

“I missed you, bestie,” she said, hugging him back. But something felt weird. Nadia realized she was looking down at the top of Adam's curly red head, a view she

had never seen before. She knew she had grown over the summer. Adam apparently had not. By the way he stood up taller when they pulled away, Nadia guessed that he had noticed, too.

“So, um, how was Egypt?” Adam asked. He seemed eager to move on.

“It was . . .” Nadia started to say. The trip had been great, as it always was. But this time, something had felt a little different, something she couldn’t quite put her finger on. She tried again. “I mean, I . . .”

“Well, London was awesome!” Adam said, perking up again. “Actually, the flight over was terrible. Puke city except for me. They ran out of barf bags! I got extra chocolate chip cookies because no one but me could eat!”

The teenage girl behind the counter looked fairly nauseated herself. “Uh . . . can I help you?”

Nadia ordered first. “I’ll take a hot fudge sundae with avocado ice cream, blueberry ripple, and, um, rocky road.” (Fun fact: Rocky road ice cream got its name because it was created during the Great Depression.)

When it was his turn, Adam stared into the case, deep in thought. “I’ll take a banana split with vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry,” he finally said.

Nadia hid her smile. Her best friend had ordered the same exact thing for five years running.

Adam continued where he’d left off as they sat

down at a table. “So the guy sitting next to me must have gone through ten barf bags himself. Even one of the flight attendants got sick. It was intense.”

“So what did you do once you got off the Upchuck Express?” Nadia asked, ready to change the subject.

“Oh, we stayed at this great old hotel in the center of London and we did all sorts of cool stuff, like the Tower of London. Went to a soccer match, too. That was Charlie’s idea.”

Over the summer, Adam’s mom had married her boyfriend, Charlie. Nadia had missed the wedding because she was in Egypt. She hadn’t spent too much time with Adam’s new stepdad, but she figured anyone who would take his stepson along on his honeymoon had to be pretty cool.

“My favorite thing was Platform 9¾ at King’s Cross Station,” Adam continued.

“What’s that?” Nadia asked.

Adam laughed. “I keep forgetting you never read the Harry Potter books.”

“You know magic’s not really my thing,” Nadia reminded him.

“Right,” Adam said. “Well, we also went to London Bridge—”

“Ooh!” Nadia said. “Did you know they used to display chopped-off heads on the original London Bridge?” She drew an imaginary line across her throat with her spoon.

“Cool,” said Adam. He took a big bite of ice cream. “I actually made a little video of our trip. Do you want to see it?”

“Sure,” Nadia said. Adam was really talented at tech stuff and his videos were usually awesome. They watched it on his phone while finishing their ice cream. But there was one thing missing, in Nadia’s opinion.

“Did you see the queen?” Nadia asked. “She has two birthdays, you know. One’s her real birthday and the other is her official—”

