

FATIMA ABASHERA

# The Lost Heirloom:



A SUDANESE STORY

To the beautiful, resilient women in my life. My mother, grandmas, and aunts who all shaped my understanding of Sudan and culture. Thank you for the countless lessons, stories, and memories you have shared with me.

-F.A

“Class, for your projects you will be exploring your heritages and culture, “  
Ms. A said.

“What does culture mean? All I know is that I’m Sudanese,” Mariam thought to herself.



“Culture can be defined as the beliefs and behaviors that are done by a certain group of people,” Ms. A explained.



“If you are having trouble thinking about your cultures or heritages, talk to your families they can be very helpful!,” Ms. A says.

“I can talk to Teta Zahra she is from Sudan!” Miriam says excitedly.



Miriam's family immigrated to America from Sudan and she was born here. Exploring her culture was something new for her as she didn't know what it all meant.

"Teta, we have a project for school about culture! What does it mean to be Sudanese?"

Miriam asks Teta curiously.



“Habibti, being Sudanese is a way of life not just a culture. I have something for you, wait here.”

Teta walks over to her closet taking down a large wooden brown box.



“In here lies a very special heirloom. The family’s hibiscus heirloom.” Teta says grabbing the lid of the box.

She opens the box and Miriam peers inside with a lot of excitement at what the heirloom looks like.





“Nothing is inside.” Miram says confusingly.

“What??” Teta says looking in the box.

“Where did it go?” Teta asks looking around frantically.



Teta goes back in the closet taking down a family portrait of herself as a baby and her parents. The heirloom hung around her mother's neck.



“There! This is how it looks.” Teta points.

“Wow! Where could it be Teta?” ,  
Miriam asks.

“I don’t know but-” Teta starts.



The picture frame begins to glow as a bright yellow light emits from the picture. Smoke and dust swirl into the air as they both look at each other in astonishment.



Suddenly, they both close their eyes and hold each other's hand.



“Where are we?” , Miriam asks helping Teta up.

“I don’t know but this all seems familiar” ,  
Teta says looking around.



In the distance, two figures emerge from the dust. One of them a tall, slender figure wearing a huge gown like garment.

With a blue and white embroidered pattern. The other figure, a man wearing a plaid shirt and blue jeans.



Teta walks towards them slowly.

“Mama! Baba!” she exclaims running into their arms.

They hug as Miriam stands in confusion.

“Miriam this is Mama Fatima and Baba Hassan. My beloved parents!”







Miriam hugs each of them still  
confused about the situation.

“We are looking for the hibiscus  
heirloom. It has gone missing!”

Teta explains.





“Habibti, to find the heirloom one has to know what it means to truly be Sudanese. Come on!”

Teta Zahra holds Miriams’ hand as they walk behind Mama Fatima and Baba Hassan.

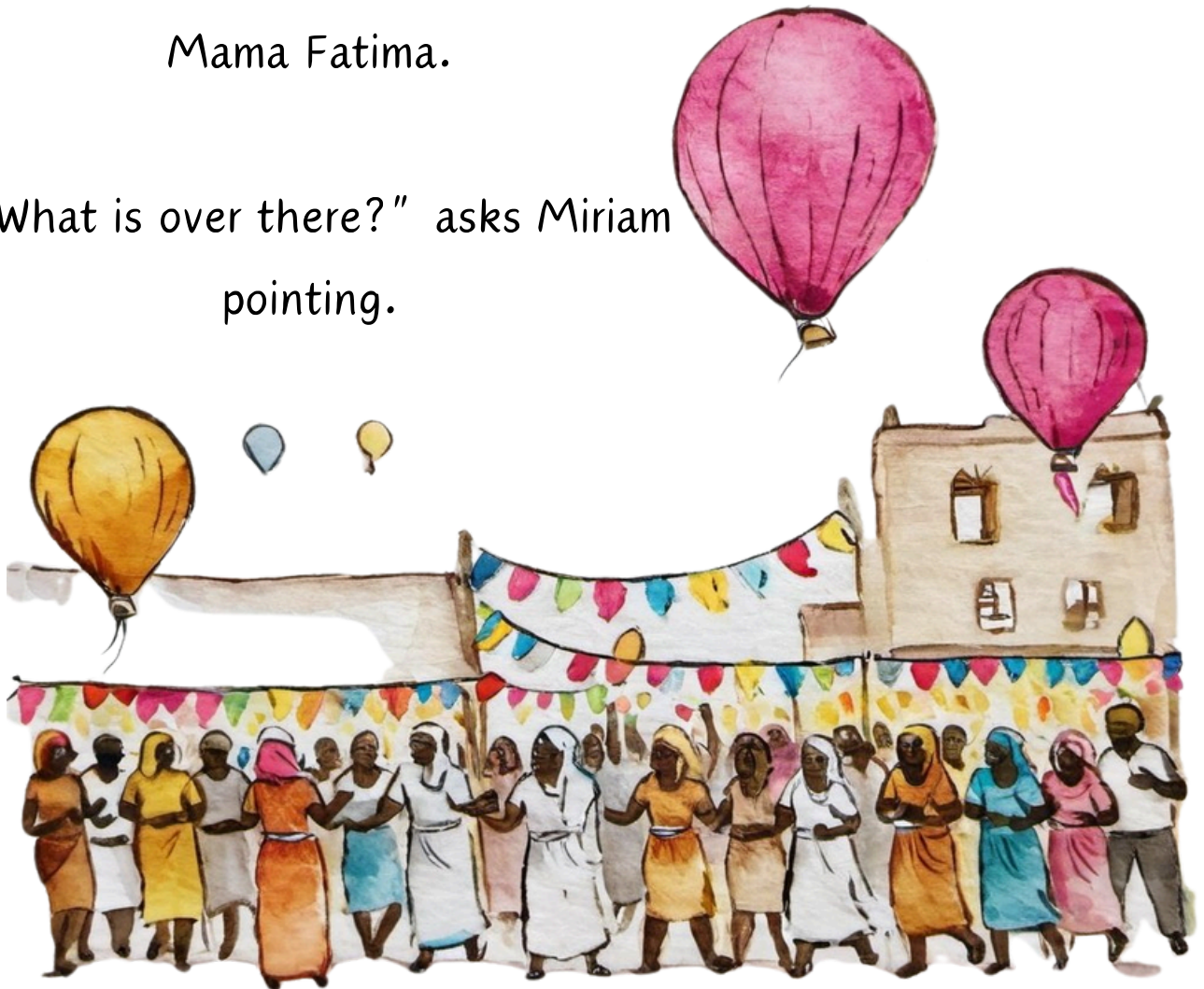


Suddenly, after walking for several minutes, they hear loud music and see vibrant colors. The smells of Sudanese food become stronger as they walk through the large crowds.



“This is an annual Sudanese festival where we celebrate our cultures and traditions,” says Mama Fatima.

“What is over there?” asks Miriam pointing.



“That’s the henna booth, where women get intricate designs painted on their hands and feet,” explains Baba Hassan.

“Can I get one?” asks Miriam.



*"Of course, dear. Let's go," says Mama Fatima*

After getting henna designs on their hands, they  
move towards the food.



“Everything looks and smells delicious,” says  
Miriam.

“Let's start with Kisra. My favorite!” exclaims  
Teta Zahra.

“Kisra is a traditional Sudanese crepe. Eaten  
with different Mulah, Sudanese stew-like  
dishes.” Mama Fatima explains.





They sit down and enjoy their meal while watching traditional Sudanese dancers perform on stage.

“Who knew Sudan was so fun!” Miriam says excitedly.





The Sudanese dancers all wore traditional Sudanese Toubas. A dress adorned with beads and different colors and designs. It was so breathtaking to look at. Mama Fatima wore a toub that was blue and white with white pearls that sparkled underneath the light.





After eating, Teta looks around as the sun begins to fall  
beneath the clouds.

“It is almost sunset we have to get moving,” says Teta  
Zahra.

They all continue their journey walking through the  
neighborhood. As they are walking Miriam kept hearing  
something rustle in the bushes and behind them.



“What is that sound?” asks  
Miriam

Suddenly, a small figure dressed  
in all black dashes in front of  
them.

“Who is that?” says Mama  
Fatima as they begin running after  
it.



Turning corners and dodging people,  
finally the figure comes to a stop.

“It is me! I have taken the hibiscus  
pendant,” a small voice says.



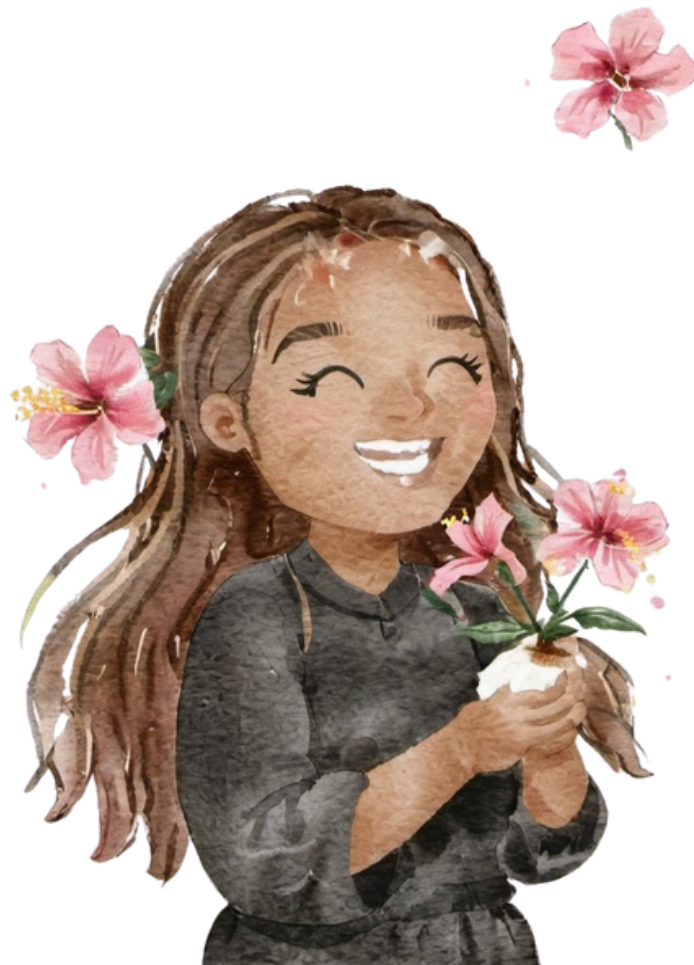
Turning around to reveal  
themselves was none other  
than Marwa, Miriam's  
younger sister.



"Marwa! Why did you take it?"  
asks Miriam frantically.

"I just wanted to learn about being  
Sudanese too!" says Marwa.

Everyone laughs and Teta Zahra  
takes the heirloom from Marwa.



“I am so glad we have found it. This journey means everything to me,” Miriam exclaims.

“Before you guys go, we want to show you a few more artifacts to help with your project Miriam.”

Together, they all walk to the family home in the neighborhood.



Inside, there is smoke in the house and a wonderful aroma.

“It smells exotic in here! What is that?”  
asks Miriam.





“That is the aroma of  
Sudanese Bakhour my dear.  
It is a traditional incense that  
we use to fragrance our  
homes and create a  
welcoming atmosphere,”  
says Mama Fatima.





"It sounds like magic!" says  
Miriam.

"Well, first, we light a small piece  
of Bakhour on a hot coal in a special  
incense burner. Then, we let the  
smoke float through the rooms  
spreading the calming scent,"  
explains Teta Zahra.



“We often use it during gatherings, religious ceremonies, and celebrations. It adds an extra touch of beauty and calmness to the space,” says Mama Fatima.



They all sit at the dining table as *Mama Fatima* disappears into the kitchen to prepare tea. *Miriam* follows her.

“First, we boil some water and add a few teaspoons of loose tea leaves. While it is simmering let me explain the importance of tea in our culture,” says *Mama Fatima*,



Miriam nods watching the bubbles  
form in the small pot.

“It’s not just a drink, it is a symbol  
of hospitality and friendship. When  
people visit, you make them this tea  
as a symbol of welcoming and unity.”

Mama Fatima explains.



They carry the gold tray out to the table and give each person a cup.

“I want two teaspoons of sugar,” says Teta Zahra.

“Never too much sugar!” Baba Hassan says.

As they drink their tea Miriam eagerly asks questions trying to write everything down quickly.



“What are weddings like?” Miriam asks.

“Well, weddings are one of the most important parts of our traditions. During Henna Night, the bride’s hands and feet are adorned with henna. The women of the family come together to celebrate the bride’s upcoming wedding.” explains  
Mama Fatima.



“That sounds beautiful!” Miriam exclaims.



“During the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom exchange vows and are blessed with a big feast,” says Teta Zahra.

“What about the clothing?” asks Miriam.





“Absolutely! The bride usually wears a traditional Sudanese Toub which you saw earlier. Sudanese weddings are not only celebrations of love but also unity and the opportunity to showcase our rich culture and heritage,” explains Mama Fatima.



“Well now that we have our heirloom and have learned about Sudanese culture, I suppose it is time to say goodbye,” says Teta Zahra standing up.

“Awww no!” says Miriam sadly.



“Before you go, I have a few things for you to take with you,” says Baba Hassan and Mama Fatima.

Miriam follows Mama Fatima to the closet.

She takes out a gown and hands it to Miriam.



"This is for you my dear," she says.

Miriam is so surprised looking at all of the sparkles  
and flowers all over the gown.

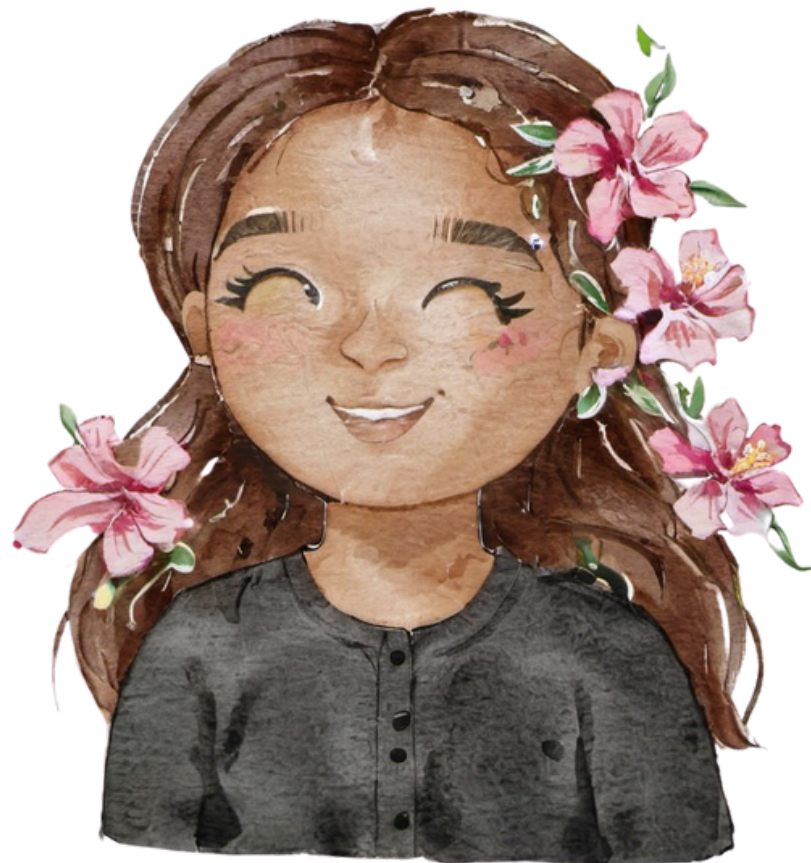
"Thank you so so much!" says Miriam hugging  
Mama Fatima.

They go back outside and reunite with the rest of  
the family.



“And for you Marwa... I made you a special cake,” says Baba Hassan handing her the pan.

“Yummy! I love Sudan,” says Marwa grinning excitedly.



Together, Teta, Marwa, and  
Miriam made their way back to  
their home with all their souvenirs  
and the heirlooms.





The Next Day...



“Okay class, I hope you all had a wonderful break filled with learning about your heritages and cultures!” says Ms. A

“We are so lucky to have family members here today to watch our presentations and be a part of this wonderful milestone. I am excited to introduce Miriam with her presentation of Sudanese culture and heritage.”





"Hello class, I am Miriam, and I am a first-generation Sudanese American. That means that my parents were born and raised in Sudan and came to America where I was born. This is also known as immigration. For my presentation, I have decided to bring a family heirloom, a hibiscus pendant that has been in my family for generations. In talking with my Teta, I have learned that being Sudanese means a lot of different things. It means eating Kisra and Mullah, getting our henna done, drinking tea with family and friends, and even wearing colorful Thoubes."



The End



Dear younger reader,

I hope that you enjoyed reading this book. It's for those who want to celebrate their roots, heritage, and the beauty of being Sudanese American. Growing up, I often searched for stories that reflected and reminded me of my own cultural experiences. I longed to see characters who looked like me, spoke like me, and celebrated the traditions like my family. This book was my attempt to fill that void and share a piece of my heritage with you all.

Through the pages of the story, I invite you to embark on a journey of discovery and celebration. Together, we will explore the rich, unique Sudanese culture. The vibrant colors, traditional music, and cuisine. More than anything, this book is about embracing who you are and where you come from. It's about finding joy and comfort in your identity with the strength of your cultural roots. It is a reminder that diversity is a gift to be celebrated and a story to be told.

So, to the younger me and all the children who want to celebrate their heritage, this book is for you. I hope it inspires you to embrace your culture and share your stories.

With love and much appreciation,

Fatima Abashera