

Cinderella By Any Other Name

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Chapter One: Disco Dancing

The beat of the music was like a hammer to her brain, pounding and pounding until her nerves felt like ash. She wanted to get out of this place but Amina was still busy flirting with the dude in the pretentious green fedora and yep - Shadya peeked downward - he had white shoes. I mean... everyone knew that any guy worth their salt never wore white shoes. Amina was giggling at what ever the guy was saying. Shadya caught sight of his friend sidling toward her out of the corner of her eye.

Nope. She was not going to play this game. She wasn't the spare, or the co-pilot, flight attendant; whatever people called the friend one went with when they were going to hit on people. She was here strictly to make sure Amina behaved herself. It was the only way to make sure they weren't both married off to the nearest willing chump forthwith. Shadya had every intention of completing her degree before she agreed to be anyone's wife. And sure her father was willing to entertain her fancies for now; but if he ever caught wind of any misbehaviour, both of their lives were over.

She hadn't even wanted to come to this club. Amina had just really been wailing to her about how it was her friend's birthday and they never got to go anywhere and yada yada yada. Until Shadya's choices had narrowed down to strangling her right there and then; or give in to her begging and pleading. Shadya had really had to think about her options before she concluded that she really couldn't kill Amina at this time. She hadn't violated any *sharia* laws after all... not yet. Nothing requiring murder at least. Her mother might frown on her committing fratricide for any reason less than that.

The guy's friend was sitting right next to her now. Shadya studiously ignored him.

"Hi", the guy said. Shadya stared into the middle distance, willing the music to explode her head right now.

"I like your hijab. Very stylish", the guy said leaning in to talk directly into her ear. Shadya turned her eyes only to give him a glare. Clearly non-verbal communication was *not* his strong suit. What did he even want?

"Leave me be", she growled tossing her head the other way as she picked up her soda and sipped determinedly as she watched the dancers on the dance floor.

"Do you want to dance?" the guy persisted. Shadya contemplated pouring her drink over his head. Amina was throwing glances her way that Shadya knew were reproachful. Her sister was always throwing herself at men; and she fully expected Shadya to do the same when they were together. It drove her mad. She didn't deign to answer the guy.

"Look, Shadya", the guy said making her stiffen and turn toward him. How had he known her name? "I don't want us to start off on the wrong foot but I have to say that you're being really rude right now". Shadya could only stare at him in shock.

"Nobody asked you to talk to me", she said in her surprise.

The guy frowned and glanced back at Amina, "Your sister asked me to", he said, looking sincerely puzzled that Shadya wasn't up to date with the news. Shadya laughed out loud.

"Well you can just go tell Amina thanks but no thanks", She told him. He stuck his hand out.

"My name is Gregory Kariuki, ahsalaam aleikum", he said.

Shadya looked at his hand like it possibly might be a hunk of bacon accidentally put on her plate.

"Excuse me?" she said.

Gregory or whatever his name was shrugged, "I'm just introducing myself", he explained like she wasn't a college student on the way to earning a first class degree in computer science.

"I got that yeah", she replied, "Why are you doing that when I just told you to leave? Are you deaf?"

Gregory smiled at her, "Not deaf. Just stubborn as all get out", he said.

"Well you'll find that stubborn doesn't work on me", she declared.

Gregory's smile became a veritable smirk, "You're speaking to me aren't you?" he asked triumphantly.

Shadya opened her mouth to protest but then found that there was nothing she could say; he was actually correct. She *was* speaking to him.

"Huh", was all she could get out.

"Come on Shadya, let's get out of here, your sister is otherwise occupied with my cousin and you don't look like you like this music much."

Shadya stared at him, wondering at the chutzpah of this dude. Did he really think she was just going to stand up and walk out of here with some total stranger who could totally murder her in the street? Possibly in some back alley and then rape her dead body and her parents' last memory of her would be the sullied remains of their still unmarried daughter.

"Do I look like I misplaced my mind somewhere or is that a joke?" she asked him, wide honey brown eyes studying him in disbelief.

Greg laughed, "I do love the way you talk Shadya. Come on, let's go. Please?"

"No", Shadya ground out, "Now leave me the hell alone before I start screaming."

Greg inclined his head, "Fine...but just remember...I asked", he said.

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Someone was shaking her shoulder and Shadya tried her best to shake them off.

"Wake up Shadya", someone shouted in her ear and she sat up startled. Her sister laughed as she danced out the door. Shadya sent murder vibes her way while slowly and painfully getting out of bed. They'd gotten back pretty late from the club what with Amina's popularity and Shadya's efforts to make her behave. She couldn't understand how her sister remained unaffected by late nights. There was only three years between them but sometimes it felt like twenty. She pulled on tights and a caftan and went in search of breakfast. It was Sunday which meant she wasn't hurrying to be out the door early enough to beat rush hour traffic. Her sister was talking in low tones into her phone as Shadya passed her in the corridor. She spared her one quick glance which Shadya returned with venom before the smell of hot mahamris propelled her to the dining hall.

"Good morning", she said to her dad. He was sitting at the end of the table, reading a paper. His wispy white hair fell over his liver spotted face as he concentrated intently on the news. He was actually her step father. He used to be an NGO worker in the camps at Dadaab when Shadya's mother and her two daughters had stumbled in,

exhausted and near starvation one day almost ten years before; looking for shelter. Escaping the war in Somalia. Vincent Paul had been there to meet them, he gave them water to drink and somewhere to rest. Every day, he came to check on them, his heart melting with pity for the too small girls with the too big eyes. There were so many people and he couldn't save them all; but he could save these three. And did.

"Good morning Shadya, how are you?" he asked with a blue eyed smile at her.

"I'm fine thank you Baba", she said reaching for several mahamris and putting them on her plate. Vincent folded his paper and put it aside.

"What are you up to today?" he asked picking up his cup of coffee.

Shadya shrugged, "I don't know. I thought I'd study circuit boards and then maybe go get ice cream with Ahmed later."

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