

Lifetime

Love



Mariam Hany



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Chapter One

The Egypt Air flight number 705 which took off from Cairo Airport at 1:30 a.m. arrived in New York's airport by 10:30 a.m. of the same day.

Among the passengers on board the plane was a sixteen years old girl who was traveling alone. She was of medium height, thin, with dark hair and dark eyes. Her long hair was made into a perfect French-braid. She was wearing blue jeans and a white T-shirt with a picture of the pyramids on it.

When the plane landed, the young girl carried her backpack on her shoulder and followed the other passengers to see where they were going. It was the first time for her to travel alone and she felt at a loss. She had no idea where to go or what to do next.

Fortunately enough, she was able to find her bags, had them inspected and then she went out of the arrival hall. She was looking around her all the time. Someone was supposed to meet her although she did not know who that might be.

She wondered how she'd be able to meet that person. She could not think of anything to do except to sit on one of the chairs and wait for whoever was coming to pick her up.

As she settled down, she started thinking about what was going on in her life. She was already beginning to regret coming to the States. Right now, she could have been staying at home with her parents, her brother and all those she loved, with nothing at all to worry about. But now, it was too late to think of that. She was already in America and she was the one who had chosen to travel in order to complete her high school studies. She was offered this chance at school among a student exchange program and she accepted it in spite of her parents' refusal.

While she was thinking about that, a voice came through the microphone calling her name,

“Miss Rana Adel Samir, please come to the front desk.”

Rana stood up, trying to decide which way to go but she could not find her way, so she asked for directions. When she arrived finally to the front desk, she found a young American woman standing there. She was rather tall with short reddish yellow hair and blue eyes. She was beautifully dressed in brown trousers and a light brown blouse.

“Hello,” the woman said smiling, “I'm Miss Catherine. I was sent to pick you and take you to the school's students' dorm where you will be staying. I hope the trip wasn't tiring. I know it's a very long flight from Egypt to here.”

“Oh, no, it was fine, thank God,” Rana said, “to tell you the truth, the whole trip passed by just as if it were a dream.”

“O.K. then, let’s go,” Miss Catherine said, “the car is waiting for us.”

When they stepped outside the airport door, Rana stood for a while fascinated by the scene she saw in front of her. She was used to see all these huge buildings and skyscrapers on TV and she could not believe that she was actually seeing them for real.

“I hope you like New York,” Miss Catherine said interrupting her thoughts, “I know it’s huge but you’ll get used to that.”

“I certainly hope so,” Rana answered.

Chapter Two

Forty-five minutes later, the red sports car drove through a very high gate and continued in a long driveway between beautiful gardens with so many trees so that the whole driveway was in the shade.

The car stopped in front of a huge, five-story building and Miss Catherine announced that they have arrived. Looking around her, Rana found herself in a wonderful place. She noticed that the building they were standing in front was one of two identical buildings and she guessed that one of them was for the boys and the other for the girls. Very beautiful gardens surrounded the buildings and huge numbers of boys and girls were moving everywhere; eating, laughing, running... Some students were studying under the shades of the trees while others were talking and playing. Everything seemed to be so peaceful and everyone seemed to be happy.

“I know you’re tired,” Miss Catherine said, “so I’ll show you to your room at once. At five o’clock, an introduction party will be held over a cup of tea where you’ll get to meet all your colleagues.”

Rana and Miss Catherine entered the building and took the steps to the first floor. Miss Catherine stopped in front of room number 115 and she knocked the door.

“Come in,” a voice from inside answered.

Entering the room, Rana took a look around to see its contents. The room was quite big with a balcony looking over one of the gardens. The contents were very simple. They consisted of two identical beds, two identical cupboards and two desks that would have been identical, except that one of them was completely empty while the other could not be seen from the amounts of things placed on it. A small table with a TV on it was placed in one of the corners in front of the beds.

Sitting at the very busy desk, with legs crossed on the chair, was a beautiful girl with dark green eyes and golden hair. She was holding a book and she seemed to have been reading in it.

“Oh, Miss Catherine,” the girl said, standing up. “I didn’t know it was you. I thought it was Suzan for I’m expecting her. Please have a seat.”

“Thanks, Jess,” Miss Catherine answered, “but I’ve got to go. I just came to introduce you to your new roommate, Rana. Rana, this is Jessica. You’ll be studying the same subjects and so you’ll spend lots of time together. I hope you’ll get along.”

“I’m sure we will,” Jessica said.

“Do you need anything else Rana?” Miss Catherine asked.

“No, thanks a lot Miss Catherine,” Rana answered.

“O.K, I’ll leave you now so you can rest and I’ll see you at five. Jessica will show you the place. Bye.”

With that, Miss Catherine left the room and closed the door behind her.

“Hi, Rana,” Jessica said after Miss Catherine was gone, “it’s really great having a roommate because it’s boring here.”

“Hello, Jessica,” Rana answered. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Please call me Jess,” Jessica said. “By the way where are you from?”

“Egypt,” Rana answered briefly.

At that moment, a knock was heard on the door and a girl poked her head in.

“Hi, Suzan,” Jessica said, “Come on in. Let me introduce you to my new roommate, Rana. Rana, this is Suzan. She too is studying the same subjects.”

“Hi, Rana,” Suzan said.

“Hi, Suzan,” Rana said. Rana noticed that the girl was very thin with long brown hair, which was made into a ponytail and large brown eyes. She was a little bit shorter than her. She was wearing blue shorts, a yellow T-shirt and running shoes.

“Do you know, Suzan,” Jessica said, “Rana is Egyptian.”

“Wow,” Suzan said, “I love Egypt. I heard lots of things about it and I’d like to visit it one day.”

“I’m really glad to hear that,” Rana said.

“So,” Jessica said, “aren’t you going to unpack your suitcases? We’re free right now and we’re ready to help.”

“That would be great,” Rana said, lifting one of the suitcases and putting it on the bed.

An hour later everything was in its right place. The two suitcases and the backpack were completely empty.

“Thanks a lot guys,” Rana said, “I really don’t know what I would have done without your help.”

“You’re welcome,” Suzan said, “although it was actually a very simple task because your things are really very tidy, so it was very clear what should go where.”

Rana discovered that she was still wearing her traveling clothes and so she took a hot shower and changed into pajamas. Jessica and Suzan prepared some sandwiches for all of them. They all ate together and then Rana, who was feeling very tired by now, decided to sleep for a while. Jessica and Suzan went to Suzan’s room so they wouldn’t disturb her.

As soon as they were gone, Rana set the alarm clock on 4:00 p.m. and she fell asleep even before her head reached the pillow.

Chapter Three

“Hey, Rana, wake up,” Jessica said shaking Rana to get up. It was 4:15 p.m. already. Jessica had returned to the room in order to dress for the party when she discovered that Rana was still asleep. It seems that she had shut down the alarm but did not get up. Instead she went on sleeping.

“Mmm,” Rana moaned, “what’s the matter?” she said, half asleep.

“You’ve overslept,” Jessica said. “It’s 4:15 already and you have to dress for the party.”

“O.K., O.K. I’m going to get up. Just give me a few minutes to...” Rana did not complete the sentence and started falling asleep again.

“Come on, Rana,” Jessica said, “it’s getting late. If you don’t get up right now I’m going to use my weapons.”

“Weapons?” Rana asked, yawning. “What weapons?”

“Weapons like this one,” Jessica said throwing a pillow at Rana’s face.

The pillow hit Rana hard and she was wide-awake now. She sat in bed laughing and she took the pillow and threw it towards Jessica who was quick enough to move and so the pillow hit the ground. For ten minutes the pillow war went on after which both girls were flushed but laughing happily.

Both girls took quick showers and changed their clothes. Rana put on blue trousers and a pink blouse. She took a jacket with her because she was starting to feel cold. A part of her dark hair was raised into a ponytail while the rest of it was left loose.

Jessica wore dark green trousers and a light green blouse. She had her hair raised in a ponytail.

The girls were just getting ready to leave the room when they heard a knock on the door and Suzan came in. She was wearing a long yellow flowered dress and her hair was made into a French-braid.

“How do I look?” Suzan asked, looking at her reflection in the mirror.

“As beautiful as ever,” Jessica answered. “Now let’s go.”

“Where’s the party going to be?” Rana asked as they stepped outside the building.

“It’ll be over there,” Jessica said pointing to a one-story building. “This is the gymnasium, but we use it as a hall for all parties and celebrations.”

The gymnasium was nearly filled with people who started clapping their hands and throwing balloons in the air as soon as Rana and the girls entered the place. A huge chocolate cake with the words ‘Welcome to New York’ written on it was set in the middle of the hall and Miss Catherine asked Rana to cut it.

After everyone drank the tea and ate the cake, the introductions were made. All the students said their names. Rana was introduced to nearly one hundred people in thirty minutes and when the introductions ended, she discovered that she could not remember even one name.

All the students were shocked when they found out that Rana was Egyptian and she laughed when she saw the looks on their faces when they knew. She knew quite well what Americans thought of Egypt and of Egyptians and she had set her mind to make them change their ideas. She promised herself to show them the truth.

Chapter Four

Rana returned to her room by 10:30 p.m. feeling terribly tired. She had been speaking non-stop for at least three hours. All that time she was being asked questions about Egypt. She laughed at what the Americans thought of Egypt because it showed their ignorance.

They thought that Egyptians still lived in tents and used camels in order to move between one place and another. They knew nothing at all about how modern Egypt has become and when Rana told them about it, they did not believe her. But she was able to prove what she said by showing them some pictures she had with her. This made some of the students feel angry and she knew quite well why. They hated the idea of Egypt's progress, but that did not matter to her. She was going to prove to all of them that Egypt is a great country.

After Rana changed her clothes, she sat in bed reading for a while, but she couldn't keep her eyes opened, so she closed the book and slept.

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Several days passed by; Rana was beginning to get acquainted with the place and the people. She also began to get used to speaking in English all the time, which was difficult at first.

It was very difficult for her to forget her parents, relatives and friends in Egypt. She was missing them every second in the day but she tried to keep herself busy so as not to have time to think about it.

Rana found out that studying in the States was very different from studying in Egypt. Studying there was actually fun but it needed more effort and yet it gave her some free time to do whatever she likes.

The school day usually ended by 2:00 p.m. and Rana then returned to her room, changed her clothes and slept till 4:00 p.m. When she woke up, she used to do her assignments with Jessica and Suzan. After that, they would usually go out for a walk and then return in time for dinner.

Days, weeks and months passed by quickly. Rana was beginning to get used to her new way of life. She had a number of friends now, yet some students were still so cold to her. They felt that they were much better than her. They tried to hurt her feelings all the time but they never succeeded in doing so for she only laughed at what they did.

Rana called her parents twice a week so as to ask about them and ensure them that she was doing O.K. in her studies and in her whole life. She also sent letters to all her friends in order to check on them and tell them her latest news. Her friends also sent her their news and what was going on in Egypt in details so as to make her feel that she was still with them.

Soon, it was time for the semester's exams. They went on very well for Rana and she felt that she did O.K. During the vacation that followed the exams, Rana, Suzan and Jessica decided to do something for fun as a kind of change.

Suzan told them that there was a tennis club near school and although neither one of them played tennis, they decided to spend a day there.

The girls were spending a wonderful time with their fun tennis game. They were laughing cheerfully at how they played and did not notice at all the man who stood outside the court's fence watching them with close attention.

Chapter Five

The girls were just leaving the tennis court after finishing their game when the man who had been watching them stepped in front of them all of a sudden. He was good looking with short black hair and black eyes. He seemed to be in his mid-thirties.

“Good evening,” the man said, but the girls were very shocked at seeing him that they did not answer.

“My name is George Samuel,” the man went on. “I coach tennis. I couldn’t help watching you girls while playing and I wanted to tell you that you’re really very talented. You could be very good tennis players if you were coached well. If you’re interested I’d like to help you with that. This is my card with my telephone numbers on it. Take your time to think about it and if it’s O.K. with you, just give me a call and we’ll work out the details.”

The man was gone as suddenly as he had appeared leaving the girls looking at each other in bewilderment. They did not have any time to understand what he’d been talking about, yet they could not stop thinking about what happened.

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Rana was sitting at her desk writing a letter to her parents when, all of a sudden, she heard Jessica, who was watching television calling for her.

“Rana, look,” Jessica said.

Rana turned around quickly to see what the matter was.

“Isn’t that the man we met at the tennis court two days ago?” Jessica asked pointing towards the television screen.

Rana looked at the screen and discovered that it was really the mysterious man whom they had met two days ago and so she went to sit beside Jessica to listen to what was being said about him.

The program which was called ‘Stars in the Dark’ was talking about George Samuel, as being the main reason for the fame of so many tennis players, for he coached very good players including the world’s number one player ‘David Andersen’. The program said that Mr. Samuel could have become a very rich man if ever he wanted to be but the problem was that he refuses to take the amount of money he deserves for coaching. He likes coaching new players and so he takes very little money from them and when they become famous and rich, he increases his salary a very small amount, which is not at all equal to the effort he exerts. The program ended

by commenting that George Samuel was becoming very famous as a discoverer of tennis champions and they wondered whom his next discovery would be.

Rana and Jessica sat quietly for two minutes after the program ended. They could not believe what they had just seen. They then decided to go to Suzan and tell her what had happened.

“What?” Suzan asked, shocked, after Jessica had finished retelling her what had taken place.

“I can’t believe it,” Suzan said, “do you mean to tell me that David Andersen’s coach himself offered to teach us tennis and gave us his card in order to telephone him if we accept?”

“Yes,” Jessica said briefly and quietly unable to believe it herself.

“So,” Suzan went on, “what are we waiting for? Let’s call him.”

With that they ran to fetch Mr. Samuel’s card and hurled downstairs to call him as quickly as they could.

Chapter Six

“Come on Rana. We’re going to be late if you don’t hurry up,” Jessica said.

“O.K. O.K.,” Rana answered, “I’m ready. Let’s go.”

The two girls left their room and went to Suzan’s room where she was waiting for them. They knocked the door and she opened it at once and they all began moving towards the stairs.

It was Friday afternoon, the time for their tennis training which had been going on for three months. It was agreed that the training should only be in the three days of the weekend so that the girls would have some time to study.

The girls took a cab and while it was moving through New York’s wide streets, Rana looked out of the window and remembered their first training.

She was feeling terribly terrified although she had been very happy when they had called Mr. Samuel and he remembered them and told them that he’d be happy to meet them. During the meeting, it was agreed that he’d train them tennis for a very simple amount of money every month. When Rana had told her parents, they were very happy for her, as they knew that she loved tennis.

Yet, on the first day of training, Rana was afraid that Mr. Samuel would turn out to be the kind of person who gets angry very quickly and who keeps yelling all the time. She hated this kind of person and she knew that she’d never be able to deal with him if he turned out to be like this.

But, thank goodness, George, as he asked them to call him, turned out to be a great man. He was kind, caring, understanding and quiet. He was also a great coach and soon enough the three girls became used to him and to the rest of the team which consisted of three boys of their age; Kevin, Michael and James. The three boys had two things in common between them. They were all tall and thin. Kevin had yellow hair with sea blue eyes. James had long brown hair and dark brown eyes while Michael had black hair and black eyes.

Soon the cab reached the club and the girls went out.

“I’m so excited about the games of today,” Suzan said as they walked towards the tennis courts.

“Yeah, me too,” Jessica said. “We’ve been training for weeks now, yet I feel so scared. It’s going to be very difficult playing against a boy.”

Rana began to think about today's events while walking beside Suzan and Jessica. Today, they were not going to have their regular training. Instead, George had decided that each girl would play a game against one of the boys. They still did not know who they each will be playing against but the idea of the match itself was terrifying.

Although it was not a real match and it was still a kind of training, they were still excited because it was the first real match they ever played. It was real because George had decided to give them scores and tell them their ranks. He told them that there was a surprise for all of them after the matches end. They were unable to wait to know what the surprise is specially that they were completely unable to guess what it could be.

The girls went to change their clothes before going to the court. When they finally reached the court, they found George and the boys already there.

“Oh, there you are at last,” George said. “We've been waiting for you for some time now. So, are you ready to begin playing?”

The three girls exchanged a look with each other and said in unison, “No!”

“That's good! That's good!” George said laughing. He knew that they were quite ready but rather terrified because it was their first match.

“Jessica,” George went on, “you and James will play in court one. Suzan, you will play with Michael in court two and Rana, you will play with Kevin in court three. The referees are waiting for you. Try to remember everything we said during the trainings. Relax, have fun and good luck to you all. I'll see you after you finish and we'll talk about your results then.”

Chapter Seven

“Give me a chance to talk,” George was saying but his voice was not heard over the rest of the group’s voices. The matches had ended and they were all eating pizzas at Domino’s right now. The six players were all very excited and they were speaking at the same time. They didn’t even notice that George was trying to say anything.

“Stop it all of you,” George shouted loudly. All of a sudden, all the people fell quiet and all the eyes were focused on George. The restaurant was dead quiet for a moment. Rana, Jessica and Suzan looked at each other, at the boys and then at George and they all burst in laughter all of a sudden.

“Guys, guys,” George said, still laughing, “seriously now, I want to say something and then you can do whatever you want. You were all really great today. I don’t really care who won or who lost. I only care that you all gave each other a tough time and that you did your best. I’m very glad to see you all exhausted like this. Now don’t you want to know what the surprise is?” he asked smiling.

“Isn’t this the surprise?” James asked, lifting a slice of pizza and biting it. For a couple of months now, they all had to follow a tough diet and so they felt that pizza was the greatest surprise in the world. They even thought that George was kidding when he told them that they were going out for pizzas at dinner.

“Well, James,” George said, “I know that the pizza is a surprise for you, yet to me it’s like a nightmare. I’m about to have a heart attack from seeing you eat all this. But, still, it is not the surprise I’ve been telling you about for some time. So, can anyone of you guess what the surprise is?”

The six kids looked at each other but no one of them said anything. They were totally unable to guess what George might be talking about.

“Well,” George said after a moment, “it seems that you don’t know what the surprise is, so I’m going to tell you. Today’s matches were not only training. They were more like an exam and you all passed it. The surprise is that you are going to play in a real championship after two months.”

Six jaws dropped open at the same moment, which made George fall from laughing. They were all unable to believe what they heard. May be George was playing a practical joke on them all or may be it was April fool’s day and they had forgotten or may be he was working with the candid camera program and today’s episode was about ‘Giving people a heart attack by saying one sentence.’ If this were the case, then George has absolutely won. But a complete minute passed and no one said, “Smile, you’re on candid camera!”

All the six kids had the same shocked look on their faces and neither one of them said anything. George had stopped laughing now. He looked at their shocked faces and said, “What? I thought you were going to be happy.”

Still no reaction was given by any one of them. “Aren’t you going to say anything?” George asked.

“You’re kidding, right?” the six kids asked at the same moment.

“No, I am not kidding,” George answered quietly, “you are all going to play in a real championship between club teams after two months. We have been training very hard and you are absolutely ready to start playing real tennis.”

“No, we are not,” Jessica said.

“You see, Jessica,” George said, “I am the only one who can decide whether you are ready or not and I’m telling you that you are one hundred percent ready, even if you don’t think so. Now, have fun tonight because starting tomorrow we are going to be having severe trainings and we are going to start the real hard work.”

“All of a sudden I lost my appetite,” Kevin said, lying down a pizza slice which had been in his hand all this while.

“Me too,” Michael said.

“As for me,” Suzan said, “I feel that my stomach has turned into one big knot that even a little water won’t pass through it.”

They all agreed that this was enough for one evening and that they should go home to sleep and have some rest.

“I will spend all night dreaming that I am a racket and that I have to hit the ball but it is running away from me,” Kevin remarked as they were all walking towards the gate of the club.

“Well,” Jessica said, “I think I’m going to be this ball and I’ll be running away from you fearing that you’d hit me strongly and kill me.”

They all laughed at these imaginations and they began to relax a little bit.

“I’m going to have a different dream,” Michael said, “I think I’ll dream that I lost the match 3 to 0 and that I didn’t even get one point and so the audience would hit

me and cause me to enter hospital and so I won't be able to play tennis anymore after that."

"I will visit you in the hospital and bring you a bunch of flowers," Rana said while laughing.

"And I will get you a box of chocolates," James said.

"As for me," Suzan said, "I would probably be lying in the room next to you, so don't forget to ask about me."

George was walking beside the group laughing at their joking. He knew that they felt tension from the news they heard but he also knew that they were really able to achieve something.

The girls kept laughing and kidding about the whole subject until they reached their rooms in the college dorm. There, they changed their clothes and they all went to sleep.

Rana did not sleep at once. She stayed in bed for a while thinking. Although she was really shocked from the news she heard and she was terrified from the fact that she was going to play real matches in a real championship, yet, in spite of all that, she was feeling very happy and excited. She felt her heart jumping from happiness. She was hoping that may be she'd be able to achieve something in this championship.

'I'll dream that I won the cup,' Rana thought smiling. 'It might be quite impossible in reality, but in dreams everything is possible.' With this idea on her mind, Rana went to sleep at last.

Chapter Eight

“Hi, Mum,” Rana said while talking to her mother on the phone.

“Hi, honey,” her mother answered her, “how’s everything going?”

“Everything’s O.K. thank God,” Rana answered.

“And how’s the championship?” her mother said.

“Great,” Rana answered happily, “we’re actually winning. Can you believe this? By the way, tomorrow we’ll be having some very important matches, so pray for us.”

“God be with you, honey, and keep us informed about the latest news, will you?” her mother said.

“Sure, Mum, I will,” Rana answered. “Listen, I’ll have to go now but I’ll call you again as soon as possible. Good-bye, Mum. Send my greetings to everyone, O.K.”

“O.K., Rana. Goodbye sweetie.” With this the telephone call ended.

Rana sat in bed thinking about her parents. She had missed them very much, yet she was beginning to feel happy in the United States. For the past two and a half months she had been very busy with the championship. It was like a new challenge in her life and since she was the kind of person who loved challenges, she was happy with this new one. They spent lots of hours in very hard training. And for two complete months, all they thought about was the championship. They watched videotapes about the other teams and how they play. They all followed a tough but healthy diet. And, at last, it was time for the championship to start. The six kids were terrified and George, although he was laughing all the time and trying to calm them down, seemed to be a little nervous himself. It was as if his skills as a trainer were put to the test for the thousandth time.

The opening ceremony was beautiful. It was a kind of an introduction party between the teams taking part in the championship. There were eight teams, each consisting of six players, three boys and three girls. As usual the championship was divided into two parts, men and women.

Rana’s team was number seven and they all liked the number and thought of it as their lucky number because their total number was seven.

In the first level, they were to play against team three. They were going to play six matches against each other; three for the boys and three for the girls. To pass the level to the next one, they should win at least two matches from the three.

Rana and her friends were terrified. They felt that they weren't going to achieve anything in this championship. George, on the other hand, was quite sure that they would be able to do something and it turned out that he was right.

Jessica played the first match. They all went with her to cheer her up. At first she seemed shocked and at a loss. But after some time, she started gaining faith in herself and her abilities and she started scoring points.

Jessica was unable to believe herself when, after the match ended, she discovered that she had won. She ran to her teammates and gave each one of them a hug. Of course, the biggest one was for George. They were all very happy. It was only then that they started feeling that it was not impossible for them to win. They also started thinking that if they win just one match out of the two next coming ones, they'd move to the next level. They felt that it wasn't that difficult. All they needed was to win one more match. This feeling gave them the motive to go on.

Suzan played the next match and she was able to win easily and so they were qualified to move to the next level. Of course it was useless playing the third match and so it was cancelled.

The boys, seeing what the girls had achieved, decided that they weren't less than them and so they set their minds on winning in order to prove that they were of the same level and so they also won the two matches easily.

Therefore, team three was disqualified after losing all their matches. Of the other groups, team five won over team one, team two won over team six and team four won over team eight. So, the four qualified teams were teams two, four, five and seven.

In the second level, team five was going to play against team two while team four was going to play against team seven.

After some very difficult matches, teams two and seven were qualified for the finals. The boys' finals were held first. Only two matches were played and Kevin and Michael were able to win easily and get the cup. Now it was time for the girls' matches.

Jessica played the first match and she was able to win easily. Then, Suzan played the second match. She did her best and played as hard as she could but team

two's player was a very strong one who had much more experience than Suzan and so she lost the match in the end. She felt terrible but her teammates and her coach all tried to convince her that there was nothing else that she could have done and that she did her best.

It was now Rana's turn to play and what a hard match this was going to be. If she loses the match, the whole team would lose. But winning the match meant winning the whole championship. There wouldn't be any other chances for them. She was their last chance and their last hope; therefore she had to win.

Chapter Nine

“Match point Miss Samir,” the referee announced into the loudspeaker in front of her.

“Quiet please,” she added, so that the audience would settle down a little bit. Their cheering was so loud that the players were totally unable to concentrate on playing.

At last the audience settled down and the playing was resumed. Rana had the serve and so she started playing. She was very excited. She tried not to think that it was only one point to winning the match. She tried to concentrate on the game she was playing but this was impossible.

Thank goodness, it seemed that her opponent was also unable to concentrate; for after the ball went back and forth between them for a number of times, Rana’s opponent hit the ball very strongly that it went way outside court.

“Hurrah,” all the audience shouted at the same time. They stood up cheering and clapping for Rana who had won this match. Rana was unable to believe herself. She stood for some moments looking at the ball settled outside the court borders before she could digest the fact that she has won.

‘I won,’ Rana thought, ‘Oh, my God. I did win. Wow.’

As usual, Rana went to shake hands with her opponent and the referee. After that she ran to the audience’s seats in order to receive congratulations from her coach and her friends who were all very happy for her.

In a few minutes the court was all set for the celebration. Rana’s opponent went up first to receive her second rank prize and then Rana received the champion’s cup. All the audience was cheering heartily and camera flashes were flashing all around the court. Everyone was very happy.

After the audience settled down, Rana was given the microphone in order to say a small speech.

Rana took a deep breath and then started speaking, “I am so glad to be here today. I really want to thank you all for your support. I want to thank George, my coach and all my friends and colleagues. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have been here today. I also wish to send many thanks to my parents who gave me so much support even though they are very far away. Finally, I want to say that this might be

the first time for me to win the Wimbledon championship but I hope it won't be the last time.”

Wimbledon?? What was she speaking about? Wasn't she just playing in a championship between clubs' teams, so how come that she was now speaking about a professional's championship?

Well, well, there has to be an explanation for all this and this explanation lies in exactly two words which are: Five Years. Yes, five years have already passed by so quickly. But, what happened during all this time and what changes took place in the life of our heroine and those acquainted with her? The answers to these questions will be found on the following pages.

Chapter Ten

The last thing we know about Rana before the passage of these five years is that she was going to play the match that was going to determine who would win the championship. But, what happened in this match? Well, Rana did win this match and this was her first victory but, as it appears, not her last one.

Rana and her friends were unable to believe themselves when they won the championship. They kept remembering the time when George told them that they were going to play in this championship and how they made fun of him and could not believe that they could achieve anything while he, on the other hand, was sure that they would do something. They now remembered all these events and laughed merrily.

This championship was merely a nice event to all of them, but to Rana, things were different. When she entered the tennis court, she felt as if she were entering her home and when she stepped on the stage to receive the gold medal, she felt that this was the most normal place for her to be. Yet, Rana did not tell anyone how she felt because she was afraid that they might mock her.

After the championship, things returned to normal. The girls returned to their studying and they continued going to the tennis trainings as usual. Soon, it was time for the end of year exams. Rana and her friends did pretty well and they were all promoted to the next year, which was to be their senior year in school.

During the summer vacations, Rana and her friends shared in two more championships and they were able to win both. George was very proud of them and newspapers started to notice their successes and to write about them;

'The Future Stars'

'Will Today's Beginners Become Tomorrow's Stars?'

'The Talented Group'

'George Samuel's New Discovery.'

These were some of the titles that appeared in newspapers after the group won their third championship.

Still Rana felt the same way about tennis. She felt that it was a part of her life that could not be separated from her and this feeling increased with every championship she shared in. Yet, she still did not tell anyone about how she felt. But George knew quite well how she felt and so he decided to talk to her.

One evening, after the training, George went to Rana and said, "Rana, can we talk for a moment, please?"

"Sure George," Rana answered.

They went to a bench at the end of the court and sat down and then George started speaking.

“Rana,” he said, “I’ve been watching you play for a long time and I have the feeling that you are different from your colleagues who want to have fun for a while and then they might or might not go on with playing tennis. May be they’d go on with playing tennis and may be in a couple of years, tennis would only be a nice memory to them. But I feel that you, on the other hand, belong inside the tennis court. The first time I saw you play, I had the feeling that you were born to become a tennis player and now I’m sure of it. That’s why I’m offering you to become a professional tennis player.”

“What does ‘a professional tennis player’ mean, George?” Rana asked.

“It means,” George answered, “a lot of hard work, much more effort than you do now. It means that tennis would become an inseparable part of your whole life. It means that you will always be following a very strict diet and lastly, it means a lot of championships with the best tennis players all over the world.”

“Wow,” Rana said.

“Now,” George said, “if you need time to think before taking a decision, that’s O.K. but don’t take too long.” He stopped for a moment and then went on saying, “So, have you thought?”

“Yes,” Rana answered smiling.

“That’s good,” George said, “we’re going to start real trainings by the beginning of the week and we’re going to set a schedule for our trainings.”

“Hey, hey, wait a minute,” Rana said, “you haven’t even asked me what my decision is.”

“There was no need for me to ask,” George said, “I saw how your eyes brightened and glittered when I told you about becoming a professional and as I told you, you belong inside the tennis court and you know that quite well. Right?”

“Yes,” Rana said.

“O.K. good,” George said. “So, I’m going to give you the rest of the week off and we’ll start from next week. O.K.?”

“O.K.,” Rana said.

Chapter Eleven

This was how it all began. George was not kidding about the hard work. Being a professional really meant a lot of work. Rana exerted a huge effort. Sometimes she trained up to twelve hours a day. The effort she was doing was even doubled when school started again. She had to concentrate on both; training and her studying. But she was able to do both successfully.

Rana graduated from school with very good grades and although she was supposed to return to Egypt as soon as she finished her studies in school, she stayed in the States because during this second year she started winning some championships. She even shared in Australia's Open Championship, one of the four Grand Slam championships. When she had started playing as a professional, her rank was number 487; and by the end of the year, her rank became number 93. She began being known and the tennis experts in America believed that she was going to have a great future if she goes on winning like this. Therefore, it was decided that she should be given a free scholarship to whichever college she chooses so that she'd go on living in the States.

Rana decided to study literature and to her good fortune, Jessica and Suzan also decided to study literature in college. So, they all went to the same college together. Rana loved her studies in college and she enjoyed everything she was studying.

At the same time, she advanced a lot in her tennis playing. She shared in lots of championships and won many of them. The first Grand Slam winning to her was Roland Garos. Rana had always loved this championship. She always watched it when she was in Egypt. Winning the championship was one of the greatest things that took place in Rana's life. It was like a dream come true. Rana was unable to believe herself when she shot the ball but her opponent was unable to reach it. All of a sudden, the audience was cheering very loudly and the referee announced that Rana Samir was the Roland Garos winner for this year.

This championship brought to Rana fame, money and it made her jump to become the fifth player on the world.

After that, Rana started winning many championships. In fact, the Wimbledon she was being honored for was her seventh Grand Slam. Besides, she had won more than twenty smaller championships. Her rank had become number one on the world after her third Grand Slam three years ago and she has been able to keep it since then.

About college, Rana, Jessica and Suzan had all finished their college studies successfully and now they had only one thing on their minds; TENNIS, for after

George had talked to Rana about becoming a professional, all the other five decided to become professionals too.

They were always training and they traveled from one place to another in order to share in championships. They visited so many countries and they learnt new languages and habits. By the end of the five years, Rana was able to speak French, Italian and German as fluently as Arabic and English.

During the college years, Rana, Jessica and Suzan shared a rented apartment where they lived for two years before moving again to where they now live.

Her parents visited her in that apartment two years ago. She was used to spend one month every summer in Egypt with her family but during that year she was very busy and so her parents came to stay with her for a couple of weeks.

Rana was so excited about her parents' visit. She was so happy that at last the chance came where they would be able to see all the things she had been telling them about and where they would meet all the people she was always speaking about. Her parents' visit meant a lot to her. She was totally thrilled about having them around. At that time, her happiness was complete.

Chapter Twelve

The white limousine drove outside the airport and moved towards Beverly Hills. Rana had returned to the States today with her friends on her private jet and was met in the airport by thousands of fans cheering for her happily.

During the ride home, Rana looked outside the window and her mind returned to the championship. She was very happy she won but she would have been much happier if her parents had been with her.

Rana then thought about how much she missed her parents for she had not seen them for two long years. During all that time, they had been in touch only through the telephone, which was not enough at all for Rana. She wanted so much to see them, to talk to them, to hug them, to kiss them... She wanted to feel that they were with her.

Soon, Rana arrived home. She now lived in a house in Beverly Hills, which was more like a mansion. It was a two floors villa, with two big swimming pools and a huge garden surrounding it. The garden included a tennis court and a stable.

As Rana got out of the car and started walking towards the front door, three beautiful small puppies and two huge wolf dogs came running quickly, barking and wagging their tails to meet her. Rana was so glad to see them. She had missed them during her trip. 'It's so nice being home again,' Rana thought.

"Welcome home, Miss," Helen, the housekeeper greeted Rana happily, "we missed you a lot. Lunch is ready."

"Thank you, Helen," Rana answered. "I've missed you too. I don't want to eat, thank you because I already ate on the plane. I think I'll just go up to my room and get some rest. It has been a very tiring trip and I need to sleep."

"As you wish, Miss," Helen answered, "I'll make sure nobody disturbs you until you wake up."

With that, Helen went on to complete her work while Rana retired to her room.

Being alone in her room, Rana returned to her thoughts about her family. She looked around her in her huge room. She had always wished to live in such a place, to have a huge villa with a beautiful garden and a swimming pool and to have such a huge room with everything she needs all for herself. But she never thought of having all these things without her family being with her. Now that she owns them, they mean nothing to her because they are empty of the love of a family. She now returns home to a bunch of dogs and not human beings who love her and care about her.

Sitting on her wide bed, Rana started to remember how her life used to be with her family in their small apartment in Egypt. They used to laugh all the time. They were always happy and content. They felt safe.

Suddenly, another thought jumped into Rana's head. It was only when she thought about how much she used to feel very safe while being with her family that she realized that she had not seen the source of this feeling of safety, which was Egypt, her country, for more than three years now. She also realized that she missed her terribly. She missed everything about her; her buildings, her streets, her noise and above all, her people; the good, loving and caring people. She missed them all very much. She missed her school, her teachers and her friends. She missed all the people she loves.

Rana simply missed everything and everyone in Egypt. She had to see them all. She felt like a fish that was taken out of the water and was now dying and the only way for this fish to go on living is to return to the water as soon as possible. That's why she has to see all those people whom she had been thinking about. She has to see them because she misses them; she misses them terribly...

Chapter Thirteen

Rana fell asleep while her mind was musing about these thoughts. She woke up three hours later feeling refreshed because she had taken a decision while sleeping which she was satisfied about.

Rana took a hot shower, changed her clothes and started getting ready for the party her friends had prepared for her at Jessica's house, which was only two blocks away.

Rana was so excited about the decision she had taken that she was unable to think about anything else as she walked down the street towards Jessica's house.

As Rana rang the doorbell and entered the house, everyone cheered and clapped for her. She smiled as she heard comments like, "Way to go", "That's our heroine" "Will you marry me?" "What about ding a project together? You work hard, bring lots of money and I spend it for you?"

Rana laughed at all the comments. The party was fun and she was cheerful. She was talking to so many people at the same time. She was being introduced to new people every second. But did all that distract her thoughts away from her decision? 'Not for a second,' the answer came out very clear. She was all that time thinking about what she was going to do and her plan became clearer every second.

"Dinner is served," Jessica announced by 10:30 p.m. All the people started moving to the dinner table in on big mass.

The dinner was great but unfortunately, Rana did not notice that. She did not even notice what she had been eating.

Soon, dinner was over and dessert was served, after which the guests started going away gradually. The number of people inside Jessica's house was becoming less every moment until at last by 1:00 a.m. the last guests went away leaving only Rana, the rest of her tennis mates and George. They decided to stay together for a while as a kind of a special celebration away from all the noise and all the other people.

"Hey, Rana," George said, "I just wanted to say that I'm really very proud of you."

"Thank you, George," Rana answered briefly.

"Rana, what's the matter with you today?" James asked worriedly. "You don't seem yourself. Is something bothering you?"

“Yeah,” Suzan said, “I’ve been wanting to ask you the same question ever since you came here. Although you were talking cheerfully all the time, you looked distracted and you seem to be very far away. You look like you’re thinking deeply about something. What’s the matter?”

“Well,” Rana answered, “I have been thinking about something for a long time. But, today, I have taken a decision which I am going to go forward with.”

“O.K.,” Jessica said, “so what’s this decision? Don’t keep us waiting. I hate suspense. Speak up.”

“I am going to Egypt,” Rana said smiling.

“You are what?” They all asked in unison unbelieving what they had just heard.

Chapter Fourteen

It took a few hours' discussion to discover what Rana had in mind and what she really wanted to do and then it took a few days' discussion to try to make her postpone her plans a little. George and her friends felt that the time was not right for her trip. They wanted her to think again and wait a little to be able to get ready and to prepare for the trip. But Rana was sure that this was the most suitable time for her trip to Egypt and so she refused to listen to anything anyone of them said.

So, after a couple of weeks of preparations and packing, Rana and her friends were on board her jet plane on their way to Egypt.

Rana was so thrilled about the fact that in a few hours she'll be seeing her parents again. She remembered how her mother cried happily when she called her and told her that she was coming. She was also thrilled for the fact that she was returning to Egypt after three years. She was returning to her hometown, where she belongs, where she really feels safe, content and completely happy.

"Rana," Michael said, "you have to sleep for some time. You haven't slept at all for more than 48 hours. You have to take some rest."

"Believe me, Michael," Rana answered, "I really don't feel tired at all. I can only feel the happiness and the excitement. I won't be able to sleep even if I tried."

"I haven't seen you so excited in ages," Suzan said.

"That's true," Rana said, "I really haven't been that excited in a very long time. It's the feeling that I'm returning back to Egypt. I have a feeling that I was lost but now I'm found. I was dying but now I can breathe again and I can go on living. You won't understand what I'm talking about because no one of you has experienced living away from his family, friends and country for so long."

"Well, Rana," George said, "I guess if you won't sleep for some time that's O.K. but as for me if I don't sleep I'm going to drop right here."

With that George went to his seat in order to sleep. All the others did the same for they were all very tired. Being left alone, Rana put a cassette tape in her Walkman and started listening through the earphones to the song that was playing.

Rana kept listening to Arabic songs all the while. All the songs she listened to were national ones because she had great memories about them. She remembered how she used to listen to these songs while sitting in her room. She also remembered the

national feasts when these songs were on radio and television all day and night and when it seemed that the whole country was singing these songs.

“This is the captain speaking,” the voice on the loudspeaker roused Rana from her daydreaming and she remembered where she was. “Please put your seats in the upright position and tie your seat belts. We’ll be landing in Cairo in ten minutes.”

Rana looked outside the window and saw the scenes she knew very well. There were the pyramids, the sphinx and there was the river Nile going through the whole of Egypt as if it were the vein that supported her life. There were the buildings, the trees, the streets, the sky... There was her life coming back to her.

Chapter Fifteen

As soon as the flight landed in the Cairo Airport, Rana descended the steps running. She was the first one to get out of the plane. She felt that she wanted to dance happily. She wanted to hug everything around her.

Inside the airport, Rana found all the employees gathering around her, shaking her hands and wishing that she has had a nice trip.

Soon, the checking of her bags and her passport were completed and it was time for her to go out; but one look at the place through the glass doors made Rana back up. Thousands of people were standing outside holding her pictures and obviously waiting for her.

Rana kept standing inside the hall, looking at the huge numbers of people without being seen by them. She was shocked and thrilled at the same time. She was shocked because she didn't know that the news of her coming to Egypt was known. And she was thrilled because she discovered that she had so many fans in Egypt, her country. She truly loved her fans all over the world but it felt different having fans from her country. They were so much closer to her because they spoke the same language, ate the same food and loved the same things as her.

“Oh my God, all these people are here to see you?” Michael said from behind her, “this is awesome.”

It surely was awesome and Rana felt very grateful for all those people. They made her feel even happier for coming to Egypt. Although she had not spoken to anyone yet, she was already feeling the love, the care and the warmth of the Egyptian people. But, in spite of all this, Rana was still standing in her place without moving an inch. She seemed to be glued to the floor she was standing on.

Ten minutes passed by but Rana did not move at all. She was still standing in the same place, looking outside the glass at the people waiting for her and saying absolutely nothing.

“Rana,” George said interfering with her thoughts, “aren't we going to go out? We've been standing here for ten minutes doing nothing.”

“I can't go out like this,” Rana said after a short pause. “If I go out now I won't be able to find my family and talking to all those people outside would take hours. My first priority now is to see my family. I have to stay with them alone for a while and then I'll talk to all these fans and stay with them as long as they want; but I have to see my family first.”

Rana thought about this subject for a while and then she said to one of the airport's inspection officers, "Excuse me please is there any place here where I can be alone with my family?"

"How many people would that be, Miss?" the officer asked.

"Well," Rana answered, "not more than thirty, I guess."

"Yes," the officer said, "there's a reception room which you can use, Miss."

"That's wonderful," Rana said happily, "can I ask for one last thing, please? Could you please call for Mr. Adel Samir, that's my dad and lead him to the room and let the people he points out only enter with him?"

"Sure, Miss," the officer said, "I'm really glad I can help. In a couple of minutes your family will be waiting inside the room."

Chapter Sixteen

“What’s going on?” Adel Samir asked angrily. “We’ve been sitting here for 15 minutes. The doors are locked and no one’s telling us what we’re waiting for.”

“Adel, please calm down,” his wife, Mona, said, “I’m sure everything will be fine.”

“Dad, please, would you just tell me what the officer told you?” Ramzy, Rana’s elder brother, asked.

“Only that I should bring the people who are with me and follow him quietly without making anyone notice and that this was Rana’s request because she doesn’t want to go out while all those numbers of people are waiting for her and that’s what I did, but when we came here, he locked the doors and left and now I don’t know where he went.”

At this moment, Rana entered the room but no one noticed her for they were all standing around her father trying to discover what had happened with the officer. Rana stood in the far end of the room, her back to the door, watching the conversation that was taking place.

“Didn’t he tell you whether the plane arrived or not yet?” Rana’s mother asked sounding concerned.

“I told you, Mona,” her father said, “he told me nothing at all. I don’t know what’s going on. If Rana had really told him to tell me so, where is she then?”

“I’m right here,” Rana said.

At hearing her voice, all the people in the room became quiet at once and they all turned to look at her not believing that it was actually her. After the shock was gone, they started realizing that it was really her and that she was really in the room with them. In an instant, they were all moving towards her wanting to shake hands with her, hug her, kiss her... They all discovered at once how terribly they miss her.

Rana, at the same time, was running in their direction with her arms wide opened, ready to hug all of them.

She threw her arms around her parents, giving them a tight, big hug. They were kissing and hugging her warmly. Her mother was crying with joy. Rana felt totally peaceful like this. She was completely happy and satisfied. She could stay like this forever but reluctantly; she had to get away in order to meet the others.

Rana then went to her brother and threw her arms around his waist. She hadn't seen him in years and it was great being with him once more. She had missed him terribly and she knew that he had missed her too. He was hugging her tightly and wouldn't let go of her. At last, she had to pull herself away.

"Welcome home Miss Champion," Ramzy said, laughing. He was trying very hard to hide the tears that were twinkling in his eyes by his laughter.

"Thank you, big brother," Rana answered smiling and not bothering with the tears which were pouring all over her cheeks.

Rana then met her uncles, her aunts and her cousins. They all said that they missed her so much and that they were very happy that she came at last. They also told her that they were very proud of her.

"Rana, you can't imagine how much we missed you," Maha, her best friend said as she came forward to give her a huge hug.

"I missed you too," Rana said, "I can't believe I spent all those years without you guys."

"Neither can we," Hala said, coming forward to greet Rana.

Maha and Hala were Rana's best friends. She was so happy to see them after such a long period of time.

"Did you receive my last letter?" Rana asked.

"Yes," they both answered in unison, and we have the answers ready for you. But we'll give them to you orally since you're here.

"We've got to spend lots of time together. We have so many things we want to talk about," Maha said.

"I'm sure you do," a voice behind Rana said. "Girls like you never stop talking. But, is it possible that you postpone the talking until we welcome Rana. We haven't seen her in years too, you know."

"Kareem," Rana said smiling as she turned around and saw who was talking. He was still the same. He was always funny and could always make her laugh.

"Hi, Rana," Kareem said as he shook Rana's hand, "I hope you had a nice trip."

“Welcome back, Rana,” another voice said.

“Tamer,” Rana said, “thank you so much. I can’t tell you guys how much I’m happy to see you.”

Kareem and Tamer were the rest of Rana’s group of friends. They all used to go to the same school together and had been close friends for a long time. Although they were in different years, they were all together in the school’s acting team. That was how they got introduced to each other in the first place. Now they had all graduated from school and college and were working, but they were still friends. Maha was of the same age as Rana. They had been always in the same class together. Hala and Kareem were one year younger than them while Tamer was one year older.

Ever since Rana entered the room, she had the feeling that she was being closely watched. At first she had no time to think about this feeling because she was totally engrossed in meeting her family and her friends. But now, after the meetings were all done, she began thinking about this feeling. She had hoped that it would go away but it didn’t. She started realizing that someone was missing and she wondered if this person was the one watching her.

Looking at the direction where she felt she was being watched from, she discovered that her feelings were correct. There he was, sitting in a chair without moving. His beautiful, tender brown eyes had been following her ever since she entered the room. He did not look at any other thing; he did not even blink. He was afraid that if he blinks he’d open his eyes again to find her gone and that this was all a dream again. He had dreamt of this moment so many times that he could not believe that it was truly happening right now. When she turned around to look at him, it was too late to look anywhere else for her eyes locked in his so quickly that he couldn’t move them away. She was as beautiful as ever, bright and fresh. Her eyes were warm and laughing...

“Amir,” Rana said, cutting his thoughts. He was the last one in the group but definitely not the least. To her, he was the most important person in the whole group. He was a couple of years older than her. Looking at him, Rana saw that he didn’t change a little bit. His dark brown hair, his tender face and his warm eyes were all there, just as she remembered them.

Rana moved forward smiling, “How are you? I’ve missed you a lot,” she said holding her hand forward to shake his.

Amir took her hand and pressed it gently, “How are you, Rana,” he said, “welcome back.”

Still holding hands, Rana and Amir's eyes were locked together and for a moment neither one spoke but their eyes were speaking rapidly. Amir's eyes were showing everything he was thinking of. They were saying 'I've missed you a lot more than you can imagine. Your returning has returned my soul to me for it went away with you when you traveled. I have lots of things to tell you. I want to tell you how much I care about you, how much I ...'

"Are we going to keep standing like this?" Rana's father asked intruding into Amir's thoughts, "let's sit down."

Chapter Seventeen

“Come on, Mum,” Rana called. “We’re all waiting for you.”

“You go ahead honey. Put the tape on and I’ll be right there with you,” her mother called back.

“No, I won’t,” Rana said. This was so typical of her mother. It was two days after her arrival to Egypt. Rana had spent most of the two days sleeping. She felt that she hadn’t slept in years and being back to her own room, in her house, with her parents gave her a feeling of being completely safe and so she fell in long, dreamless sleeps. Finally, she was up. All her family and her friends gathered in her house in order to see her. They started asking her about her life in the States, where she lived, what she wore, whether she had a car or not. They wanted to know everything about her life there. That was when Rana told them that she had made a videotape of all the places she goes to and all the people she knows. They were now all ready to start watching this tape, but, as usual, Rana’s mother was in the kitchen fixing something. Rana had decided that she wouldn’t start the tape until her mother finishes whatever she was doing and settles down.

At last, her mother came and sat down to watch the tape. “Here we go,” Rana said, as she pressed the play button.

The tape started by showing Rana standing in a huge garden with tall apple trees everywhere. In the background a very wide, two floors white building was seen.

“Where were you here?” Maha asked.

“That’s my house,” Rana said, “and I’m standing in the garden.”

“That’s your ‘house’?” Kareem said. “That’s a palace! I thought it was the White House and that you were the new president of the United States.”

“Oh! Who are these?” Tamer asked as two wolf dogs came running into the picture. They jumped on Rana and threw her to the ground and the three went on playing together.

“These are Roy and Lacey, my dogs,” Rana answered. “They just had three beautiful puppies.”

“Why don’t you give me one of them?” Tamer asked.

“No,” Rana said firmly, “I promised Lacey that she’s going to have all her children with her and that I’m not going to give anyone of them away... Look, this is the living room.”

Rana was now inside the house, sitting in a typical American living room and waving to the camera. Behind her some movement was seen and then Jessica, Suzan and Michael entered the room. They said ‘hello’ to Rana and waved to the camera before sitting down. Right behind them, Kevin entered carrying a huge plate filled with doughnuts in one hand. In the other hand he had a doughnut which he was eating. His mouth was full that he was unable to say anything and he couldn’t even wave because his two hands were busy. At his sight, Rana and her friends started laughing.

All the people watching the tape were also laughing heartily, especially when Rana and the others started taking the doughnuts from the plate while Kevin was unable to stop them or get away from them. He looked so funny when every time he tried to get away from one of them, another one started taking the doughnuts. In the end, they left him with an empty plate.

The tape was now showing Rana on another day getting into a huge limousine while the driver was holding the door for her.

“That’s Steven,” Rana said.

“Who’s Steven?” her father asked.

“My driver,” she answered.

“Do you mean to say,” Ramzy said, “that this is your car?”

“Yes,” Rana said.

“This huge, terrific, wonderful, beautiful, extravagant car,” he said, “is yours?”

“Yes,” Rana said again.

“O.K. then, when can I go to the States with you?” he asked.

“What for?” Rana asked.

“To take a ride in this car and then I’ll come right back,” Ramzy said.

“Rana, did the tape end?” Hala asked.

“No, it did not,” Rana answered.

“So what is a motorcycle race doing in the middle of it? Oh, I see. You were at the race and so you taped it.”

“No,” Rana said, “actually, we were not *at* the race. We were *doing* the race and so they taped it for us. We are those six motorcyclists.”

“What?” they all asked, unbelievably.

“Yes,” Rana said, “motorcycling is a great sport. We all enjoy it a lot and that’s why we do such races between us all the time.”

“Is it still early for the tape to end Rana?” her mother asked, “I want to prepare dinner.”

“No, mum,” Rana said, “there’s only the last part left. The plane part.”

“What plane?” Tamer asked.

“The plane that brought us here,” Rana answered.

“What did you shoot that for?” Kareem asked.

“Well, because...” Rana started to say, but was stopped in mid-sentence.

“Don’t tell me,” Hala said, “it’s yours, isn’t it?”

Rana nodded her head slowly.

“You own a jet plane, Rana?” Kareem asked unbelievably when he saw the picture on TV.

“Yes,” Rana said smiling.

After the plane was shown from the outside and the inside with all its accessories, the tape ended because the plane was going to take off and so they all had to be seated.

After the tape ended, they all got very busy preparing dinner. The boys set the table while the girls went to help Rana’s mother in the kitchen.

During dinner, Maha commented saying, “You’re living like a queen in the States, Rana.”

“Yes,” Rana said, and after a short pause she added, “but all this can never be compared with even one day in Egypt, with the people I love.”

“Do you mean to say that you’re ready to give up all this and return to live in Egypt permanently?” Hala asked unbelievably.

“I certainly mean that,” Rana said in a matter of fact manner. “Did you think I’d go on living there forever? I hate to be so far away from my country, my home and all the people I love.”

Amir, who had been completely silent all evening while watching the tape, now smiled inwardly and started eating his food with more appetite than he had in years.

Chapter Eighteen

“Rana come on. You’ve got to wake up,” Jessica said, pulling Rana’s hand and trying to make her wake.

Suzan and Jessica were trying to get Rana out of bed. She was sound asleep but they had decided that it was time for her to get up. While Jessica was pulling her hand, Suzan was jumping on the bed and pulling the covers away from her.

“Go away,” Rana shouted. She was feeling very tired and she needed to sleep.

“No way,” Suzan said, “you are going to get out of bed right now because we are already late and we have to get moving.”

“Late for what?” Rana asked.

“For the beach,” Suzan answered. “The sea is calling us. You should see its beautiful blue color. I never saw such an incredible color like this. I can’t wait to be in it, so come on.”

Rana smiled at the way Suzan was talking about the beach. It was fun seeing her excited like that.

“I know how the beach of Sharm El Sheikh looks like, Suzan,” Rana said, sitting in bed. “I’ve been here before many times. But I can’t imagine that you’ve come to wake me up by 8:00 a.m. in order to tell me that the sea looks beautiful. Have some pity please. We only went to bed a couple of hours ago.”

“Come on, Rana,” Jessica said, “we can’t wait any longer. We have to go to the sea and you have to come with us. It’s your country and you know all about it. We want you to show us all the beauties of the Red Sea. Weren’t you the one who said that it is the most beautiful sea in the world?”

‘Well,’ Rana thought to herself, ‘they are right. It is my country and I know it quite well so I should be showing them around. Besides, I did say that the Red Sea is the most beautiful sea in the world, so I should prove this to them.’

“O.K. then,” Rana said, out loud, “I’m going to get ready but first you have to prepare us some sandwiches, some drinks and some extra, unwanted bread.”

“Extra bread,” Suzan said, “what for?”

“Just do as I tell you,” Rana answered. “Are the others up yet?”

“We don’t know about your family and your friends,” Jessica said, “but George, James, Michael and Kevin are all up, ready and they’re waiting for us.”

“O.K.,” Rana said, “why don’t you try knocking just once on every room and if anyone is up, tell them what we’re going to do for maybe they’d like to join us, and I’ll get ready.”

“O.K.,” Suzan said, “but hurry up.”

Rana dressed quickly and then went to the beach with her friends. None of the others were up yet and so they left them notes telling them where they were. They reached the beach by 8:45 a.m. and in a few minutes they were all inside the freezing water.

After a few moments, their bodies got used to the water and they began to enjoy their swim.

“This is really the most beautiful sea in the world,” Jessica said, “the water is so clear and the coral reefs are beautiful and your idea of bringing the bread to feed the fish is wonderful. Lots and lots of fish are gathered around us.”

“Wow,” Suzan said, looking around her, “this place is fabulous. The nature is very beautiful here. The sea is so calm and clear. Its color is incredible. And all those mountains around us are beautiful. I’ve never been to such a place in my life.”

Rana could see that her friends were impressed by what they were seeing around them and this made her very happy.

* * * * *

In two hours’ time, they were tired of swimming and dying of hunger and so they decided, reluctantly, to go out of the water and have breakfast.

“Come on, Rana,” James said in between bites, “finish eating quickly. We still have a lot of swimming to do.”

Rana looked at him and went on eating at the same rate. She was smiling inwardly at seeing how furious he was.

“Good morning,” a voice from behind Rana said. She turned around to see Amir standing behind her looking wonderful in his dark blue shorts and a white t-shirt.

“Good morning, Amir,” she answered, feeling happy all of a sudden. “How did you sleep yesterday? Was the room O.K.?”

“It was fine, thank you,” Amir said, “and I slept deeply as if I hadn’t slept in years.”

“Why don’t you take a sandwich?” Rana asked.

“Thank you, I’ve already had breakfast,” Amir answered.

“Come on Rana,” Michael said impatiently.

“Aren’t you going to take a swim with us?” Rana asked Amir.

“No, thank you,” Amir answered, “you can go ahead. I don’t really want to swim today.”

“O.K. guys,” Rana said, “I’m up with swimming for today. You can go without me. I’m going to stay here.”

“Come on, Rana,” George said, “don’t be boring. You’ve got to come with us.”

“Why do I have to go with you, George?” Rana asked smiling. “Are you going to be lost in the sea if I don’t come with you? Now go and don’t waste any more time.”

Finally, they were gone back into the water. Rana and Amir, being left alone fell into deep silence. They were unable to decide where to start talking and at the same time, they were both engaged with their personal thoughts.

Amir was thinking of a way through which he could tell Rana how he really felt about her. She had no idea that all through the years when she was away, he hardly slept because he was all the time thinking of her. Yesterday was the first time he sleeps soundly since years ago because he was satisfied with the feeling that she was in the room next to his.

Today, he had watched her for more than forty five minutes while she was in the sea with her friends but they did not see him. And he discovered once more how much in love he was with her. Yet, he was still unable to tell her how he felt because he was afraid that may be she’d refuse him and then he wouldn’t be able to talk to her again.

Rana, on the other hand, was thinking about her sudden reaction when she saw Amir. She had been ready to go for another swim. Actually, she had wanted another

swim, but when Amir said he wasn't going to swim, she found herself refusing to go all of a sudden. As a matter of fact, she couldn't wait for her friends to go back to the water so she'd be alone with him. She felt so happy when he was around, even if he barely talked to her. She just loved watching him talk, eat, walk....She discovered that the long six years which have passed had not changed her feelings at all. But, since her return, she felt that something was different. She felt that he was attracted to her although he tried so hard not to show it. She only hoped that he'd talk and tell her how he really felt. But then an uninvited thought jumped into her head, 'what if he was really in love with you? Would you marry him when you are....' She was unable to go on with her thought. This was a horrible thought and she didn't know how she'd react if it were to happen.

Rand and Amir didn't say a word to each other or to anyone else for the rest of the day. They were deeply engrossed in thinking but they did not know that they were thinking about each other.

Chapter Nineteen

“Wow,” Kevin said, “the sea air opens my appetite terribly. I eat here as if I have never seen food before in my life.”

“You always eat as if you have never seen food before in your life,” Suzan said teasingly.

Kevin glared at her angrily and went on eating. Everyone laughed heartily at the scene. Suzan and Kevin were always nagging each other like children. They just loved teasing each other. They were all sitting around the dinner table after a very long day in the sea which made them feel very hungry.

“Rana,” Jessica said, “What are we going to do after dinner?”

“The usual,” Rana said, “go shopping.”

“Are we going to spend the rest of the holiday like this?” Jessica asked, “Going to the sea in the morning and going shopping in the afternoon? Why don’t we do something different, something exciting?”

“I was just thinking about that,” Rana said. “You know I’m bored with routine and doing the same things every day. So I thought that from tomorrow we could do something new every day.”

“What do you have in mind?” Jessica asked, interested.

“Well,” Rana answered, “I thought that may be tomorrow we’d take a yacht and go diving and snorkeling beside one of the islands. I was thinking of spending the whole day on board. What do you think?”

“Wow,” everyone said in unison.

“This is a brilliant idea,” her father said, “I’ve always been dreaming of spending a day on a yacht in the middle of the sea.

“I’m happy that you liked the idea,” Rana said, “because I already booked a yacht and it will be waiting for us by 9:00 a.m. All we have to do now is to go shopping because we’ll need so many things on board.

“Tell me, Rana, what else do you have in mind for the rest of the vacation?” George asked, excited.

“O.K.,” Rana said, “I’ve been thinking of horse riding and mountain climbing. What do you think?”

“That’s great,” George said, “we’re going to spend a wonderful time. Let’s get started. I can’t wait for tomorrow to come.”

“Rana, you’re the best,” Suzan said, “Three cheers for Rana,” she shouted, “hip hip.”

“Hurray,” everyone shouted in unison.

Rana was glad to see that they were all feeling happy. She prayed inwardly that everything would go on fine and that they would all enjoy their time.

While all the people were cheering and talking at the same time, one person was sitting quietly at the table watching Rana from his chair which was far away from her. He liked sitting there because that way he was able to watch her without anyone noticing, especially her. She looked so beautiful tonight. She was happy and her eyes were twinkling with laughter. It was so good seeing her happy and laughing. Amir was so happy for her and he prayed that she’d always be happy.

Chapter Twenty

“Rana, I really want to tell you how much I enjoyed myself today,” Amir said. “I spent a wonderful time. I haven’t had so much fun in ages. Thanks a lot.”

“I’m very glad, Amir that you liked the day and had a nice time,” Rana said. “I hope you’re going to enjoy the horse riding tomorrow.”

“I hope so,” Amir said. “Well, I guess we’ve got to go to sleep now in order to wake up fresh in the morning.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right. I feel very tired. I might drop asleep right here for I can’t keep my eyes opened. Good night. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Good night, Rana.”

Amir waited in his place until he saw Rana entering her room and then he walked towards his own room. It was 10:30 p.m. They had returned from the yacht, where they spent a wonderful day, half an hour ago. All the others had gone to their rooms right away because they were feeling very tired and Amir decided to use the chance to talk to Rana for a while since they were alone without having tons of people buzzing around them.

There were so many things which Amir wanted to tell Rana about but could not. He was always known to be a good speaker who could express himself well. But when it came to telling Rana how much he loved her, his tongue forgot that it could pronounce any words at all. He was very afraid from her reaction that he was not able to open the subject at all.

Entering his room, Amir changed his clothes and went to bed, but he did not sleep. He sat in bed remembering the events of the day.

He woke up by 7:30 a.m., dressed quickly and then went to the restaurant where the whole group met for breakfast after which they went to the yacht.

Rana was wearing green shorts, a red t-shirt with a matching hat and white sneakers. She was wearing sunglasses which hid her eyes, but still Amir thought that she looked very beautiful. She was blooming and she seemed very happy.

Amir could not stop himself from watching her. His heart was jumping joyfully for seeing her happy. Seeing her smile was enough to make the whole world around him laugh.

The yacht started moving by 9:00 a.m. During the first part of the trip most of the people on board were sea sick. They felt very dizzy and had to take some medicines and so they did nothing at all except stay in place.

Soon, they reached the island where they were going to spend the day. Arriving there, they put their things on the beach and in a few minutes they were all in the sea. The water was terrific. They had so much fun swimming together. There was no other person around them which was surely better. They kept swimming for hours, racing and playing games in the water. Their laughs could be heard a long distance away.

Swimming made them feel terribly hungry and so by 2:00 p.m. they decided to have lunch. After lunch, some of them slept while the others started playing cards and chess.

Amir remembered how much he enjoyed that part of the day and hoped it would never end. Rana had wanted to play dominoes but no one wanted to play with her. Being a dominoes lover himself, Amir took the chance and played with her for more than two hours without feeling bored. It was the longest time he spent with her alone ever since she returned from the States. They talked a lot while playing and Amir had the feeling that she was not too far away from him. For the first time in his life he felt that maybe if he declared his love to her she would accept it and would agree to marry him.

As they say, happy times end quickly. That was exactly what Amir felt when Rana's friends started waking up and planned to go snorkeling and of course, Rana and Amir had to go with them. He felt that the two hours they spent playing were more like two minutes. He was unable to enjoy any events during the rest of the day but he was very grateful to dominoes for giving him such an enormous chance.

After snorkeling for another couple of hours, they all got out of the sea because the water was starting to get cold and at the same time, they were very hungry. They ate dinner and talked for some time about the day's events and how much they had enjoyed it. They also planned next day's events. They were going to go horse riding in the desert.

'Well,' Amir thought as he sat in bed, 'if I was not able to tell Rana about my feelings today, I'm going to talk to her tomorrow. I've got to put an end to all my fears and my hopes and reach the truth whatever it might be. I've got to talk to her. I've got to talk to her...'

Chapter Twenty One

“Amir, come on. Wake up. We’re going to be late,” Tamer said pushing him. He had been trying to wake him up for five minutes now.

“I’ve got to talk to her,” Amir mumbled.

“What did you say?” Tamer asked.

Amir opened his eyes to see Tamer sitting beside him. “What time is it?” he asked sleepily.

“It’s 8:00.”

‘I must have slept without noticing,’ Amir thought.

“Come on, get out of bed,” Tamer said, “We are all ready and waiting for you. They’ve all gone to have breakfast and we have to meet them there.”

“O.K. O.K.,” Amir said, “I’m getting up.” Saying that, he threw away the blanket with which he was covered and got out of bed.

Twenty minutes later, Amir and Tamer joined the rest of the group for breakfast.

“At last you showed up,” Jessica said as soon as she saw them, “we were starting to lose hope.”

“Come on, eat quickly because we’ve got to go.” Suzan said.

After ten more minutes, they had all finished breakfast and they started their trip. They went to a huge horse ranch where they rented horses for all of them. After that they went to the place where they had decided to spend the day. This was a vast sandy spot beside the sea. It consisted of flat sand which made it possible to ride horses there. The mountain shaded the place from the sun and the sea gave the air a beautiful breeze. All in all, the place was just perfect.

They set the umbrella by the beach and put their things under it. Then they all went looking for the horses they were going to ride.

Amir couldn’t help watching Rana as she moved around. She seemed to be as sensitive as a rose and as light as a butterfly. Her hair was made into a ponytail and it went bouncing up and down as she ran about. She was wearing black shorts and a

yellow t-shirt. They were very simple, yet elegant and beautiful. Amir had to admit to himself that he liked whatever she wore. 'Anything she wears would look beautiful,' he used to tell himself.

"Come on Amir, which horse are you going to ride?" Tamer's voice awakened Amir from his daydreaming. Looking at where the horses were, Amir saw that Rana was riding a white horse and he decided to ride a horse of the same color.

"Rana, where are you going?" Jessica asked as she saw that Rana was moving her horse to the right side while they were all going left.

"You know I like to ride against the wind and feel it hitting my face," Rana answered.

"But we're all going the other direction," Jessica said.

"O.K.," Rana said, "you can go on and when I've had enough wind I'll join you. But right now I need to go that way. I'll see you after a while."

Saying that, Rana gave her horse a small nudge with her foot and left the saddle loose for him to run as fast as he wants. In a few moments, he had gained speed and was nearly flying on the soft yellow sand. Rana closed her eyes and enjoyed the cold air while it hit her face.

'This is marvelous,' Rana thought to herself happily. She was enjoying a lot the horse ride which she had missed terribly. 'The last time I rode a horse was nearly a year ago and since then I did not get the chance to ride again. I was so busy playing tennis that I didn't have any time to ride. I'm so happy I came to Egypt to be able to do all the things I love but did not have time for.'

The sounds of other hoofs in the sand disturbed Rana's thoughts. She looked behind her and saw Amir on his white horse running very quickly after her.

Rana smiled to herself happily. Well, she was ready to have a race now. She begged her horse to go even quicker.

"Come on boy, come on," she told the horse, "don't let him reach us. We've got to win. You know, if he doesn't reach us I'll buy you a whole sack of sugar. That's a promise."

Rana looked over her shoulder once more to see where Amir was but this time the smile faded away from her face and it was replaced by a look of shock and fear. It seemed that the saddle had slipped from Amir's hand and he was trying hard to control

the horse and stop him but was not able to. He even seemed to be slipping and about to fall.

“Amir...” Rana shouted. In one movement, she made her horse turn around and run as fast as he could in order to reach him in time before anything happens to him.

Mid way to where Amir and his horse were, Rana saw Amir fall to the ground. “Please God,” Rana prayed, “let him be O.K. Don’t let anything happen to him. I’ll never forgive myself if anything bad happens to him.”

The horse was now completely loose. It was running uncontrollably. It had turned around and ran backwards a distance and then turned again and now it was coming forth again at full speed.

“Oh my God,” Rana shouted. The horse was running directly to the spot where Amir was lying and if he didn’t move, the horse was going to step on him and Rana knew that this could kill Amir instantly.

“Amir, please move,” Rana shouted at the top of her voice, but Amir did not move an inch. “Oh my God,” Rana said, “he has fainted.”

Rana was so afraid of what might take place in a few seconds. She begged her horse to go even quicker. At last, Rana reached the spot where Amir was. She jumped down her horse, grabbed Amir quickly and rolled him down the beach right before the horse came running by and making a dust of sand around him by his hoofs.

Rana looked at the horse after it passed them by a few inches and then looked at Amir who was still out but breathing. “Thank you, God,” she said and then she closed her eyes and lied down beside Amir feeling terribly tired and unable to move.

“Rana, what happened?” Tamer asked worried. “I was just returning to the umbrella when I saw Amir fall down. Is he O.K.?”

“I don’t know,” Rana said, “I guess we’ll have to take him to the hospital and we’ll find out there. Let’s just hope that he’s going to be O.K.”

Chapter Twenty Two

“Uh, mm, where am I?” Amir asked slowly as he opened his eyes and saw all his friends standing around him. His head was aching badly and he wasn’t sure he was able to move at all.

“Amir, are you O.K.?” Tamer asked looking worried.

“I guess so,” Amir answered.

“You fell off the horse and we had to bring you to the hospital,” Tamer explained, “You broke your leg and bumped your head on a stone. You lost so much blood, but other than that you are fine. Your leg will be perfect in a couple of weeks.”

Amir started to remember what had taken place. He was running after Rana and she had seemed to enjoy the game. But then, all of a sudden, his saddle had slipped out of his hands and he lost control over the horse. He even remembered hearing her calling his name worriedly right before he fell down. He couldn’t remember anything which took place after the fall.

“Amir,” Rana said, “I’m so sorry for what happened to you. I feel it’s all my fault. If I hadn’t made the horse run so quickly, you wouldn’t have lost control over your horse. I’m sorry. I really regret what I’ve done. I was so worried about you.”

Amir’s heart ached as he looked at Rana. Her eyes and her nose were so red. It seemed that she had been crying. He couldn’t help but feel angry from himself. ‘You made the most beautiful and sensitive creature in the world cry because of you,’ he blamed himself inwardly. ‘But, what had she just said? She said she was worried about me. This means that she cares. She really cares about what happens to me.’

“Rana, please, you shouldn’t blame yourself at all for what happened,” Amir said out loud. “I could have fallen down anywhere and anytime. It just proves that I’m a horrible horse rider,” he finished smiling.

Rana couldn’t help but smile back.

“Visit time is over,” a nurse announced.

“Well, Amir,” Rana said as she was going out, “I really hope you’ll be fine in the morning. I’m going to come and see you tomorrow.”

They all went away, leaving Amir and Tamer alone in the room.

“You’re going to spend a couple of days in the hospital until they make sure that you’re fine,” Tamer said, “and since I was sure that you won’t be able to stay away from me for all that while, I decided to give you the honor of staying with you here.”

Amir smiled at the way his friend was speaking.

“Thank you, Tamer,” Amir said. He was really very grateful for him for offering to stay with him. He really didn’t want to be alone in a hospital room.

After that, Amir became completely silent and he was drifted into very deep thought.

“What are you thinking about?” Tamer asked, sitting opposite him on the bed.

“Rana,” Amir answered. “She seemed so sincere in her sadness. I can’t believe she blames herself for what happened to me.”

“She’s a very strange girl.” Tamer said. “She didn’t stop crying ever since we brought you here and she didn’t stop saying that it was all her fault although she is the one who saved your life.”

“She did?” Amir asked. “How’s that?”

“Well,” Tamer said, “she jumped off her horse and moved you right before your horse came running on the exact place where you were lying. You could have been killed if it weren’t for her braveness to jump in front of a horse running so wildly. Another couple of seconds and the horse would have stepped on both of you. After that, when we brought you here, you had lost lots of blood from the fall and you needed blood transfer but they couldn’t find your blood type anywhere. But when Rana discovered that it was the same type as hers she did not hesitate for a second to offer her blood for you. So, as you can see, she saved your life twice today.

Amir was amazed by what he had just heard. Rana had been apologizing to him and telling him to forgive her for being the cause for the accident but she didn’t tell him that if it weren’t for her he could have been dead by now.

“Do you mean to say,” Amir asked quietly, “that the blood running in my veins is Rana’s blood?”

“Yes,” Tamer said, “I guess that’s what I want to say. She gave you a second life.

‘Yes,’ Amir thought, ‘she gave me a second life. This was the last thought on his mind as he drifted in a long, quiet sleep.’

Chapter Twenty Three

Amir woke up early the next day feeling much better. Tamer was still fast asleep, so he tried not to make much noise so as not to wake him up. He sat in bed looking at the contents of the room which he had not seen the day before for being in such a terrible state. The room was so nice and cozy with two beds and a sofa. In front of the beds was a small table which had a television on it. The view outside the window was incredible. It looked on a garden filled with lots of beautiful, colorful flowers.

While he was admiring the flowers in the garden, Amir heard a light knock on the door. "Come on," he said.

The door opened slowly and Rana came in. Amir was so glad to see her and he was even happier to see that she was alone for he had been hoping to be able to talk to her. There were so many things he wanted to tell her.

Rana smiled brightly when she saw that Amir was sitting in bed, her eyes sparkled with happiness and her whole face seemed to be shining. "I can see you're better today," she said.

"Yes, I am, thank God," Amir answered. "Please, sit down," he added, pointing to a chair beside the bed.

Rana sat down and then she asked, "How are you feeling?"

"I feel great," Amir answered, "all the pain I felt yesterday is completely gone. I'm as good as new."

Tamer fidgeted in bed which made Rana take notice of him. "I can see that Tamer is still asleep," she commented.

"Yes, but not for long," Amir said as he took a pillow from behind him and threw it on Tamer.

"Amir, please don't wake him up," Rana said. "He had a very hard day yesterday."

"I know," Amir said, "that's why I've left him sleeping until now. If it had been him, he would have waked me up a couple of hours ago in order to keep him company."

Amir took another pillow and threw it on Tamer. This one did the job. Tamer moaned loudly and then he opened his eyes to see what was going on.

“Good morning,” Amir said, “come on, wake up. Visitors are starting to arrive and you’re still sleeping.”

It took Tamer a couple of moments to be able to remember where he was. Finally, he got up yawning and rubbing his eyes. “Good morning,” he said as he moved towards the bathroom, where he changed his clothes. He then combed his hair and left the room saying that he was going to find something to eat.

Amir and Rana sat quietly for a moment after Tamer was gone and then Amir started talking.

“You know, I’m really glad that Tamer has left. There are a couple of things I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Really? What are they?”

“Well,” Amir went on, “the first thing is that I want to thank you.”

“Thank me? Why?” Rana asked confused.

“For saving my life,” Amir answered. “Tamer told me all about it yesterday. If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t have been alive now.”

“Don’t say that,” Rana said. “But really I didn’t do anything extraordinary. Anyone in my place would have done the same.”

“I don’t think so,” Amir said.

They became silent once more and this time it was Rana who started talking.

“You said you wanted to talk to me about a couple of things,” she said. When Amir nodded, she went on saying, “so, what’s the other thing?”

“Well,” Amir started, feeling at a loss all of a sudden, “it’s something I’ve been wanting to talk to you about for a long time now but I was waiting for the right chance.....I was thinking of getting married.”

Rana’s face lit up and she smiled happily, “That’s great, Amir. Did you find a bride?”

“I was kind of hoping you’d help me in this point,” Amir said. “You know me well, so you can tell what the character of the woman I would marry should be like.”

‘What have I done?’ Amir thought to himself. ‘Couldn’t I just say: yes Rana, I’ve found a bride. She’s the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen in my whole life. I’ve loved her for years and right now, she’s sitting on a chair opposite me... Or couldn’t I say: well, Rana if you agree to become my wife then I did find my bride... No, I had to complicate things more and ask her about the character of the woman she would choose to be my wife. I’m such a big fool.’

At the same time Rana was deep in thought herself. ‘Of all the people in the world, he wants me to help him choose a wife. That’s very sarcastic. But, since I love him from all my heart, I’ll do my best to show him the qualities he should be looking for in the woman he’d marry and when he chooses this woman, whoever she might be, I’ll be very happy for him.’

“O.K.,” Rana said out loud, “let’s see what the woman you can marry should be like. First, the outer appearance; you’re handsome and good looking so I guess she should be good looking and handsome also.”

‘I can’t believe my ears,’ Amir thought. ‘Did Rana just describe me as handsome and good looking? This is incredible.’

“Now, your characters and hobbies have got to match. You are smart and you have a strong character, therefore, you have to marry someone with a strong character also so that you’d feel that she’s your equal and not someone inferior to you. Lastly, about your hobbies; I believe that although you are very modern in the way you dress and in your actions, you are very classical in your hobbies. You read classical stories and you listen to classical music. I believe that’s how I see your bride. As to whom she might be, I think that you’ll be able to find many girls with these qualities but it will depend on you to choose whoever you feel suitable for you.”

Amir stayed silent for a while after Rana finished talking. He was amazed at how well she analyzed his character and had described all the things which made him attracted to her and which made him love her and believe that she was the only suitable person to share his life. Finally, he was able to open his mouth and say,

“Rana, I believe I have found the girl with all the qualities you have been talking about and more than that, I’m totally in love with her.”

“Really?” Rana asked trying to sound normal. ‘If he’s in love, then why is he telling me all this? Why didn’t he just confess his love to her?’ Rana thought sadly.

“And who might this lucky girl be?” She asked. “Is she someone I know?”

“Yes,” Amir answered quietly. “It’s...you.”

Chapter Twenty Four

“Me?” Rana asked surprised.

“Yes, Rana,” Amir answered, “I’ve been in love with you for years but I wasn’t able to tell you. And ever since you came back, I was waiting for a chance for us to be alone in order to tell you but I was afraid that you’d refuse me and then you wouldn’t want to talk to me anymore. That’s why I kept quiet all that time, feeling that being with you, even if for a short while, is better than not seeing you at all. But I can’t go on like this anymore. I’ve got to tell you how I really feel and then you can do whatever you like. Rana, I love you and I would be the happiest person on earth if you accept to be my wife.”

There, he had told her the whole truth and now he only had to wait to hear her answer. They both kept silent for a while. Amir felt that his heart was about to stop. He looked at Rana and saw that she looked surprised and shocked. It seemed ages before she started talking.

“Amir,” Rana said slowly, “I’m really honored with your offer to marry me. But all this is a very big surprise to me. I guess I’ll have to take some time to think and then I’ll give you my answer.”

With that, Rana grabbed her bag and went out of the room very quickly before Amir could say anything else. ‘At least she didn’t say no.’ Amir thought after she was gone.

“What?” Jessica asked surprised. “He really asked you to marry him?”

“Yes,” Rana answered quietly. She had run back to the hotel, found Suzan and Jessica by the pool and told them that she had to talk to them urgently. Right now, they were her closest friends who knew everything about her and she had to tell them what had happened. They returned to the room and locked the door so that no one would disturb them. Rana sat cross legged on one of the beds while the two of them sat facing her on the other bed.

“And,” Suzan asked, excited, “What did you say?”

“I said that I needed some time to think before giving him an answer,” Rana answered.

“What?” Suzan asked shocked. “And how long would that time be, may I ask?”

“I don’t know,” Rana said.

“Rana,” Jessica said quietly, “you’ve got to tell him the truth.”

“And what should I say?” Rana asked.

“Well,” Jessica said, “just go to him and say: Amir, I’ve had a crush on you for more than seven whole years and now I’m totally in love with you. I would really love to marry you but I can’t right now because I’m

“NO,” Rana cried out cutting her off in mid-sentence and sounding afraid all of a sudden, “I can never tell him that.”

“Rana,” Suzan said, “he’s going to find out someday. They are all going to find out someday. You can’t go on hiding the truth forever.”

“I know,” Rana answered slowly, “but I just can’t tell them and I think we’ve discussed this topic lots and lots of times before coming to Egypt.”

“Yes we did, but now things are different,” Jessica said. “He is actually asking you to marry him. Do you understand what that means, Rana? You have been torn apart for seven whole years. Have you forgotten? Because if you have I can remind you. I can never forget what you told me about Amir and about how much you love him. You were always speaking about how you found in him every small, tiny, little detail of the man of your dreams. ‘He is handsome, he is smart, he is caring, he is romantic,...’ weren’t these your own words?”

“Jessica is right, Rana,” Suzan said, “I mean, you really love the man from all your heart and I’ll show you the proof.”

Suzan grabbed Rana’s bag, opened it and got her purse out. She took a picture out of it and showed it to Rana. Looking at the picture, Rana saw Amir smiling at her.

“Isn’t that the picture you’re always carrying around?” Suzan asked. “Whenever you opened your purse and saw this picture, you used to move the tips of your fingers on it as if you wanted to touch his face and you always used to smile when you saw it. Do you remember your comment? ‘He has such a beautiful smile and I love it.’”

“Rana,” Jessica said, “for seven whole years you have been thriving to know any news about him. Remember when you got news that he was sick and you could not concentrate on anything you did until they told you that he had become better? And didn’t you mention to me that before travelling to the States you couldn’t move

your eyes away from him whenever you saw him? ‘It was as if they were fixed on his face,’ you said. Whenever he was around, you saw nothing and felt nothing else but him. Your only problem was that you felt that he didn’t notice you. ‘Sometimes I feel he doesn’t even know I exist,’ you said. Now you know that all your fears were nonsense. He did notice you and he knows very well that you exist and he loves you just like you love him. Are you going to forget all this and let it go because of such a trivial reason as this? I think you should tell him the truth and let him decide.”

“No,” Rana said firmly. She was quiet for a moment and then she went on, “I’ve never forgotten what you’re talking about and I don’t deny it either. Yes, I’ve loved Amir for nearly seven years. I’ve loved him from all my heart and it tore me apart being away from him for all this period. It also tore my heart not knowing what he thought of me. I can’t deny that I was very glad to know that he loves me. His declare of love was the most beautiful thing I ever heard in my life. My heart felt as if it were flying in heaven when he told me that he loves me. I was about to scream with my loudest voice saying: ‘I love you too’, but then I stopped myself. I realized that I can’t marry him, not in the meanwhile at least. At the same time, I can’t tell him the truth because I know he’d insist on our marriage and I can never let that happen.”

Rana’s eyes filled with tears and they started rolling down her cheeks. It took her a few moments to compose herself and then she went on saying, “It’s easier for me to leave him waiting until I find a solution than to tell him the truth.”

Suzan and Jessica looked at each other without saying anything. They knew that there was nothing else to be said. Rana had taken her decision and nothing could change her mind.

After a short while Jessica asked quietly, “So, Rana, what are you going to do now?”

“I’ll do exactly what I told Amir I’ll do...I’ll think,” Rana said.

A period of silence followed these words. Suzan and Jessica let the subject drop for now and they changed the topic.

“By the way Rana,” Suzan said, “some Egyptian television program phoned and said they wanted to have an interview with you. I made George talk to them and he set a date with them after two weeks and told me to tell you in case you need to change the date.”

“No,” Rana said, “that’s just fine.”

Chapter Twenty Five

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Today, we have with us in the studio a character who you all wanted to know more about. She arrived to Egypt two months ago and did not talk to any journalists or do any interviews ever since. We are very glad to be the first program to have this interview with our great tennis champion, Miss Rana Samir.”

Finishing her introduction, the interviewer turned to face Rana.

“Good evening Miss Rana and welcome,” she said.

“Good evening,” Rana answered.

“Rana, why don’t you tell us first about your personal information? Like your full name, the date of your birthday, the number of brothers and sisters you have and whether they are younger or older than you?”

“O.K.,” Rana said, “My full name is Rana Adel Samir. My birthday is on the 17th of June but I’m not going to tell you which year. I have only one brother, Ramzy and he is two years older than me.”

“Rana, we all know that you became a tennis champion in the States, but we don’t know why you travelled to the States in the first place?”

“I travelled to the States six years ago to complete my Secondary studies among a student exchange program. Playing tennis happened by mere luck. I was once playing tennis for fun with my friends and George, my coach, saw us and told us he wanted to coach us. We didn’t even believe him at first and we left him and returned home. But when we saw him on T.V. we decided we’d give it a shot and thank God, he turned out to be an excellent coach.”

“That’s a very interesting story, Rana. I’m sure that George saw in you a champion ever since he first set eyes on you and that was why he chose you. But tell me Rana, did you think that you’d become a tennis champion when George told you?”

“No,” Rana said, “I couldn’t believe what he said. I didn’t even take it seriously. I always thought that what he said was very funny. He was even very angry with me whenever I laughed when he said that one day I’d become a champion.”

“But it turned out that his words came out to be true and you really became a champion. Now can you please tell me your feelings as a champion and how your life changed now that you are a tennis champion?”

“Surely I’m happy for being a tennis player. I really love tennis and I’m glad I’m able to do something I love. As for my feelings as a champion, I don’t really know how champions should feel. I feel just the same. I mean, I’m still Rana Samir as I always was. Nothing at all has changed in my life except that I’m always on diet.”

“Rana, we all know that you’re Egyptian and that you lived in the States for six years. Would you please tell us what you love most about the States and what you love most about Egypt?”

“In the States, I love the order. Everything there is so organized. But Egypt...Egypt is my country. I love everything about it. But mostly, I love the people; the kind, loving and caring people. I would like to add that everything I have done and everything I have achieved was for the sake of Egypt and to prove to the whole world that Egypt is really a great country.”

“Rana, lots of people asked us to ask you the next question although it’s a very personal one. Why didn’t you get married until now?”

“This is really a personal question,” Rana said, “but I’m going to answer it anyway. I didn’t get married because I was in the States and I promised myself that I’d never marry an American. When I marry I’m going to marry a real Egyptian man.”

“And would you live in the States or here in Egypt?”

“I believe we’d live here in Egypt because I want my children to be Egyptians and I want them to live here among their family.”

“Rana, at the end of our program we thank you a lot. We really spent a wonderful time with you and we hope to meet you again. With all our best wishes for you to progress in your life.”

“Thank you very much,” Rana said, “and goodbye.”

Chapter Twenty Six

‘She looks so beautiful,’ Amir was thinking as he watched Rana moving around the hall meeting people and talking with every person for a while. They were in the biggest hall in the Sheraton Hotel where a party was being held for Rana. So many actors, actresses, singers and tennis players were there. Rana’s family and her friends were also there.

Amir was sitting at a table with Tamer and Kareem, but they had both gone to meet the actors and get their autographs, leaving him alone at the table. He did not move from his place at all and did not seem to notice anyone or anything around him. His eyes were focused on one person in the whole place. He followed all her movements closely. He wondered if she knew that he was watching her. He wondered if she felt what he felt about her. He wondered if she knew how much he loved her. He was starting to feel desperate. He had told her how he felt; he had confessed his love to her and had offered to marry her. She had told him that she’d think and then give him an answer, but since that day, she didn’t mention this topic again. It was as if they never had this conversation. Amir wanted so badly to ask her but he remembered his promise to himself not to open the subject again unless Rana opens it herself.

“Rana, he’s watching every move you do. He didn’t take his eyes away from you for a second,” Jessica said as she came to stand beside Rana.

“I know,” Rana answered briefly.

“I’m sure that he truly loves you from all his heart,” Jessica said.

“I know,” Rana answered again.

“How can you be so cold?” Jessica asked angrily. “The man loves you dearly from all his heart and I know quite well how much you love him and yet you don’t want to tell him so. This is insane.”

“You know that I can’t tell him my feelings.” Rana said, nervously.

“Why not?” Jessica snapped.

“Because I can’t lie to him. How can I tell him that I love him from all my heart, but at the same time can’t marry him?” Rana said, tears gathering in her eyes.

“Why don’t you just tell him the truth as it is and let him decide?” Jessica asked.

“I can’t do that,” Rana answered quietly. “I can’t... I just can’t...” Rana’s voice failed her and she started crying bitterly.

Jessica felt the conflict that was taking place inside her. She wished she could help her, but there was nothing she could do. She wrapped her arms around her and gave her a tight hug and a pat on her shoulders until she became calmer.

“I’ll go out for a second to wash my face and calm down,” Rana said as she moved towards the door.

No one in the whole place noticed what was taking place except one person only. He felt that his heart was about to be broken to pieces when he saw Rana crying. He wanted so badly to know what had happened to make her so sad all of a sudden. She had just been laughing. What possibly could Jessica have said in order to make her so sad? How much he wished to be standing beside her at this very moment to wipe her tears with his hands, to give her that hug and to soothe her in her sadness. But, unfortunately, he was unable to move from his place. He could just sit and watch quietly and hide his feelings and his pains deep inside his heart because he was unable to trust any person enough to tell him what he was going through.

Now that Rana had gone outside, Amir’s eyes stayed fixed at the door entrance waiting for her to come back. He hoped that she’d return relaxed and happy as she’d been during most of the party.

Five minutes passed but Rana had not come back yet. ‘Come on, Rana,’ Amir cried inwardly. ‘I need to see you. I need to know that you’re fine. Why are you so late?’

Amir wanted to go out to check on her but decided to wait for another while. Another fifteen minutes passed away and still Rana did not come back. No one seemed to notice that she had gone out; but Amir was unable to sit still for another moment. He got up and went out to see what was going on.

‘If I meet her outside,’ he thought, ‘I’ll think of any reason for me to be out. I just hope she’s O.K.’

Amir had no idea where he’d start looking for Rana. They were in a very big hotel and she could be anywhere. ‘Nevertheless,’ he thought, ‘I’m not going inside again until I find her and make sure that she’s fine.’

Amir walked outside the hall and looked around him in both directions but did not see anyone. He decided to walk towards the staircase to see if she’d gone downstairs. As he walked closer to the staircase, he started to see something; a

beautiful light blue color which he'd seen before. All of a sudden, his heart leapt in his chest and he felt very worried. The light blue color belonged to Rana's dress.

Amir ran anxiously and as he came closer he saw that Rana was lying on the floor with her left hand holding her waist and her right hand holding the fence very tightly that her knuckles were very white. She seemed to be in such an unbearable pain. She was moaning loudly and the tears were rushing down her cheeks very quickly. She was even biting her right arm with her teeth in order to stop the pain or get over it. The pain seemed to be breaking her up.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Amir wanted to call for help but his voice wouldn't come out. The sound of his anxious breaths was heard from a distance and his heart beats felt as if they were racing.

He ran to Rana's side and without saying anything he lifted her from the floor. Rana looked at his worried face with her blood red eyes but wasn't able to say anything. She held so tightly to his shirt with her right hand and rested her head on his shoulder. Her left hand never left her waist. Her sobs were getting louder and the pain seemed to be increasing every second.

Without saying anything, Amir started running towards the door. He decided that there was no time to tell anyone anything or to wait for help. So he decided to take her to the nearest hospital at once.

"What's the matter? What happened?" Rana's father asked worriedly as he came rushing to the waiting area in front of room 312 where Rana was.

"I don't know, Mr. Adel," Amir said, "I found her lying on the floor, crying and she seemed to be in terrible pain to the extent that she wasn't even able to speak, so I brought her here at once and then I called you. Four doctors have been with her for more than half an hour and not one of them has come out to say what the matter was."

Rana's father went to see his wife who was crying worriedly and leaning on Ramzy's shoulder. He too seemed to be very worried about his sister.

Jessica, Suzan, George, Michael, James and Kevin all came in very quickly and they seemed to be very calm. Amir noticed that an elderly man who was obviously American came with them. He talked to a nurse for a while and then she led him to the room where Rana was.

Amir wondered who the man was but what confused him more was the reaction of Rana's friends. He knew that Rana chose her friends carefully and he felt, ever since he first met them, that they were good friends to Rana and that they really loved her but why didn't they seem to be the least worried about her. 'May be they know something,' Amir thought, 'but what is it, I wonder.'

“I told her not to go to the party,” Suzan said in a low voice. “She was starting to feel the pain while she was dressing, but she refused to listen to me. She just took a pill and went out.”

“It’s not strange the stage which she has reached,” Jessica said. “She’s doing an incredible effort when all she should do is to rest in bed.”

“You know Rana,” James said. “She’s ready to do anything so her family won’t be worried about her.”

“Yes,” Kevin agreed, “and at the same time, she wanted to spend some time with them before telling them the truth and having to enter hospital.”

“I think that if it were left to Rana,” Michael said, “then she would have never told them the truth.”

“That’s right,” George said. “Do you remember when they used to call her while she was in the hospital and she insisted on talking to them no matter how much pain she felt.”

“The problem is,” Suzan said, “that Rana cares for the emotions of her family and her friends a lot more than she cares for herself.”

At this moment, the door was opened. A doctor and the elderly American came out and walked slowly towards the group. They seemed to be so grim as if they didn’t know how to say the news to the group.

Rana’s father went to the doctor and said, “Please doctor, tell me what’s wrong with my daughter. I’m Adel Samir, Rana’s father.”

“Hello, Mr. Adel,” the doctor said. “Your daughter is fine for the time being. I’m going to tell you what’s wrong with her in a second. But let me first introduce Dr. Joseph Myer, Rana’s doctor. Dr. Joseph has been treating Rana for more than two years now and he knows everything about her illness and her condition. Thank God that he accompanied her when she came to Egypt. We are going to work together to save your daughter’s life. But first of all we need a donor as soon as possible.”

“A donor?” Mr. Adel asked. “What donor?”

“Mr. Adel,” Dr. Joseph said, “your daughter has extreme kidney damage. She needs a kidney transplant right away and we need to find someone to donate his kidney to her. The operation has to be done in a week’s time maximum or your daughter’s life will be truly in danger.”

Chapter Twenty Eight

“How are you now, dear?” Rana’s father asked as he stood next to her bed.

“I’m fine, dad, thank God,” Rana answered, but her father could see that she was not fine at all. She seemed to be so tired and although she was given a strong sedative, she still seemed to be in pain.

“What did the doctor tell you?” Rana asked.

“Everything,” Jessica answered briefly.

Rana gave out a sharp short grasp of breath as Jessica’s words settled in.

“Rana, how could you keep such a secret? Why didn’t you tell us?” her mother asked.

“I couldn’t Mum,” Rana answered. “I was so happy to be back in Egypt and to be with you. I saw that you all were also happy and I wanted to spend as much time as I could with you before having to enter hospital. I couldn’t just tell you that one of the main reasons which made me come back was to have an operation done here while I’m among my family and friends and while I’m in my country. I had to postpone this fact for as long as possible and I had to enjoy every second I spent with you outside hospital walls. But, as they say, happy times end quickly, for here I am in a hospital waiting for a vague and unknown future.”

“Rana, don’t talk like this please,” Ramzy said. “We are going to find the right donor and with God’s help, the operation will be done and you will live a wonderful, healthy life.”

Rana’s eyes wandered around the room as if she was looking for someone and then she asked, “Where’s Amir? I want to thank him for what he did for me.”

“I don’t know where he went,” Suzan said. “He was standing with us outside and all of a sudden he excused himself saying that he had something important to do. He went away quickly but said that he’ll catch us here.”

“He seemed to be so worried about you Rana,” James said.

“Yes, I know,” Rana said. “Of all the people I know and who were in the party, it had to be him to find me in such a state. I saw the worried, shocked and anxious look on his face when he saw me lying on the floor. I wanted to say something to comfort him but I wasn’t able to speak. When he lifted me, I heard his heart beats

racing after each other. He didn't say a word but the fear which I saw in his eyes showed exactly how he felt. I wonder where he is.”

Nearly two hours passed by before a knock was heard on the door and Amir came in. Rana's face brightened, her eyes glittered and she smiled cheerfully when she saw him.

Amir also seemed to relax when he saw that she was feeling better. He came to her bedside and stood looking at her very exhausted face without saying anything.

“Hi, Amir,” Rana said.

“Hi, Rana,” Amir answered quietly, “how are you feeling now?”

“I'm fine, thank God,” Rana answered. After a short pause she went on saying, “Thanks for saving my life.”

“I did nothing worthy, Rana,” Amir said. “Anyone in my place would have done the same thing.”

“I doubt it,” Rana said.

At that moment a nurse came in to announce that the visiting hours were over and that they had to leave.

“We'll come to see you tomorrow,” James said before going away.

“I think tomorrow's fine with me,” Rana said jokingly. “I'll be here. I'm not going anywhere.”

Chapter Twenty Nine

“Good morning, Rana,” Dr. Joseph said as he entered the room the next morning. Rana’s family and friends were all sitting around her trying to cheer her up and make her feel better. Amir was the only one sitting in the corner quietly and not saying anything. He was looking at Rana worriedly. She was talking and laughing cheerfully and although she was able to deceive them all and make them believe that she’s feeling better; he could see quite obviously that she was still in pain and that she wasn’t feeling well at all.

“I’ve got a piece of news for you,” the doctor went on. “You’re going to have the operation done in two days’ time.”

“What?” Rana asked. “How can this be?”

“Well,” the doctor said, “we found a donor yesterday. He is completely ready to give you his kidney. We’re just waiting for some test results, but I think that he’ll be the right one.”

“He?” Rana asked.

“Yes,” the doctor said, “it’s a man.”

“And who might that be?” Rana asked. “I’d like to meet him.”

“I’m sorry, Rana,” the doctor answered, “but he refused to make his name known. He doesn’t want anyone to know what he’s going to do.”

“How much is he going to take?” Suzan asked.

“Not a penny,” Dr. Joseph answered.

“What does that mean?” Rana asked confused.

“He says that he’s donating his kidney to you and not selling it,” Dr. Joseph said. “When I offered him money, he was very hurt and said that I was insulting him this way.”

“I’d really like to see that man,” Rana said.

“You are going to see him on the day of the operation,” the doctor said.

Two days passed very quickly and soon it was the day for the operation. All the test results were positive and showed that ‘the donor’ was the right person to give Rana a kidney.

The operation was to be done by 12:00 p.m. Starting from 10:00 a.m. the doctors began preparing Rana for the operation and by 11:30 a.m. they transferred her to the operation room.

Ten minutes later, the doors were opened and the nurses came in pulling another stretcher. Rana tried to see who her mysterious donor was but one of the nurses was standing right in front of her making it impossible to see anything.

When the nurses went away, Rana looked to her left where the donor was lying. Looking in front of him, and not at her, was no one other than Amir.

Rana was shocked when she saw him. He didn’t say anything. He was the one who had been doing the tests for the past two days? How come? He had been staying with her all the time. No. Now she remembered. On the first day when she entered the hospital Amir disappeared for a long while and she asked about him. That was when he did those tests.

“No,” Rana cried out loud. She tried to get out of bed but Amir was quicker. He jumped out of his bed and he rushed to her side and held her hand to keep her from rising.

“Amir, please,” Rana pleaded with a choked voice and tearful eyes, “don’t risk your life for me. Don’t do this please. I won’t allow you.”

“Rana,” Amir said quietly, “I love you. Do you understand that? I really love you and I won’t allow anything to harm you as long as I can stop it and now I can save your life with a small part of my body. Don’t you think that this is such a small thing to give to someone you love? I’m ready to give you my whole life, not only my kidney. You are going to do the operation and you are going to be fine, God wills.”

Rana tried to talk but the tears which were running down her cheeks made her unable to utter a single word. At that moment the doctors came in.

“Are you ready?” Dr. Joseph asked.

“Yes, doctor,” Amir said, “and please make Rana better as soon as you can.”

“Dr. Joseph,” Rana said, “take good care of Amir please and please don’t harm him because I can never tell you how dear he is to my heart. He’s the most precious person to me in the whole world.”

Chapter Thirty

“Hi, honey,” Rana’s father said as soon as she opened her eyes. “Thank God for your recovery. How are you feeling now?”

Rana looked around her and found all her family and her friends standing around her. She still felt numb and sleepy but she forced herself to open her mouth and say just one word, “Amir?” she asked.

“He’s fine, dear, thank God,” her mother answered. “The operation was a total success and you are both in excellent form. He is in the room next to you.”

“I want to see him,” Rana said trying to lift herself and get out of bed.

“You can’t see him right now dear,” her father said. “You’ll have to keep in bed for some days before being able to see him.”

Dr. Joseph and the nurse entered the room to check on Rana. “So, how’s my beautiful patient?” the doctor asked.

“I’m fine, thank you doctor,” Rana answered. “How’s Amir?”

“He’s just fine,” the doctor said. “I was just with him and he asked about you and asked me to give you this.” Saying this, the doctor handed Rana a red rose. Around the stem was a paper with one sentence written on it: I love you from all my heart...Amir.

Rana smiled as she read the paper and she held the rose close to her heart. “Doctor,” she said, “are you sure that the operation was successful?”

“Definite,” the doctor answered, “I promise you Rana, if God wills, you’ll never suffer this pain again.”

Rana asked to be given a white rose from a vase beside her bed, a pen and a paper. She wrote two very brief words on the paper, wrapped it around the rose and gave it to the nurse in order to give it to Amir.

Amir received the rose happily, kissed it, opened the paper and read the words ‘me too’ on it and smiled satisfied. ‘Now,’ he thought as he closed his eyes and held the rose to his chest, ‘I’ll be able to sleep.’

“I was about to become completely crazy inside the operation room,” the doctor was telling Rana.

“Was the operation difficult to that extent?” Rana asked.

“No,” the doctor said, “actually, the operation was very simple. You were the reason.”

“Me?” Rana asked, surprised.

“You and Amir,” the doctor said. “You kept calling for each other all through the two hours of the operation that I felt that you were memorizing each other’s name. You went like this: Rana...Amir...Rana ...Amir...Amir...Rana...

For two complete hours I heard nothing at all except your names.”

Rana couldn’t stop herself from laughing when she heard what the doctor said.

“What are you laughing at?” he asked. “Do you think it’s funny?” Rana was still laughing and everyone in the room started to laugh heartily and so the doctor went away seemingly angry although he was also laughing.

“Congratulations, Rana,” Jessica said as she gave her a big hug.

“Thanks a lot Jess,” Rana said, “for everything.”

Three months had passed since the operation. Rana and Amir were both in full health. Amir told Rana that he understood why she couldn’t answer him at first and so he offered to her again. This time Rana confessed her true and complete love for him and so they decided to get married as soon as possible. Rana sold everything she owned in the States and decided to stay in Egypt, her first love and her hometown, forever.

Jessica and Suzan were sad because she was going to leave them but wanting her happiness and the best for her they were happy for her. Rana decided to work as a tennis coach in order to teach small children the techniques which they’ll need to become professionals. Jessica, Suzan, James, Kevin, Michael, George and Dr. Joseph all decided to extend their stay in Egypt until Rana’s wedding and then return without her to the U.S.

Right now, Rana was putting on her wedding dress and the veil. Her friends were helping her with her makeup and her hair. They all congratulated her happily and wished her happiness in her life.

“Here,” Rana said, “I’m ready.” She stood up with her long white dress, with the white veil on her head and a beautiful bunch of white and red roses in her hand and they all saw in front of them a very beautiful and happy bride and they thought, ‘she deserves to marry a man who loves her so dearly like Amir does and he truly deserves her for she has loved him her whole life. Their marriage shows clearly that true and honest love can never die.’”

The End.