

# 1

## ∞ The Legacy ∞

For centuries, men had fought and died over the peculiar assortment of rocks now resting in the hands of the five-year-old girl. The diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, which were exquisite to begin with, were made even more so by the practiced hands of Wahid Amin. Nearly three hundred years ago, as a jeweler who catered to royalty and those rich enough to associate with them, he had been summoned to the palace by the Sultan of Morocco.

“I have something to show you, Wahid.” The sultan’s voice had the regal tones of one raised in the lap of luxury—his every whim fulfilled. It also rang with the harsh clip of a ruler who, on many occasions, had condemned men to death. When he was younger, he had relished this power—to declare war, to affect the world in massive ways. It was as if the flick of his hand could topple mountains.

At first, having children didn’t change this. His sons Achmed, Ata and Aziz were born in annual succession, beginning a year after he had married Shahira, who had been given to him as part of a political negotiation, but

## Summer Island ~ A Tiara for the Taking

whom he had quickly grown to love—a surprise to them both.

Their fourth child was a girl. Shahira, who had birthed the other children so easily, struggled mightily with this one. There were many old women in the palace who knew this did not bode well. No child could cause this much trouble arriving that it wouldn't be ten times as much trouble when it got here. But of course no one would dare mention this to the father who paced the hallways, day and night, listening to his wife's anguished screams. The worst moments were when there was only silence and he would slam his fists against the tapestry-clad, stone walls. Then the entire palace was deathly quiet, save for the sobs of a powerful man, powerless to relieve the suffering of his wife.

By some miracle, both the sultana and the baby survived. The sultan hadn't realized how much he had longed for a daughter until the baby *amira* was placed in his arms. When he wept with gratitude, relief and joy, his wife quickly dismissed her handmaidens so he would not be shamed in front of them. He named the child Fatima, after the Prophet's daughter, in hopes that Allah's blessing would follow her in what was sure to be a difficult life.

Surprising all of them, Fatima was a happy baby. She rarely fussed or cried and seemed content in anyone's arms. Even alone in her bassinette, she would gurgle and laugh with any sort of amusement. This delight matured into a more precocious temperament. As a toddler, she routinely escaped the security and privacy of the harem, to race throughout the palace at all hours. She seemed determined to find every possible hiding place and was a constant plague on the nerves of the four women charged with her care.

Around the age of five, her personality seemed to shift again. She became incredibly reserved and vigilantly observant. Watching everything, she would go hours, sometimes even days, without speaking. Each one of an

## The Legacy

endless string of tutors found this too frustrating and none lasted very long. One day, the sultan hired Abdul Haq, a young scribe, who somehow understood the child. He would present her with information—algorithms or historical problems—and she would take a few days to ponder them. Then, in one amazing display of brilliance, she would summarize the political dilemma or prove the mathematical theorem.

Unlike his wife and sons, the sultan was never unnerved by his daughter's peculiarities. He doted on her and for Fatima's eighth birthday, the sultan insisted upon a lavish celebration. Her favorite culinary delicacies—everything from *kaab el ghzal* to orange blossom parfait—adorned the tables. Jugglers and acrobats entertained the guests.

And even though there were hundreds in attendance, Fatima knew the instant her father left to attend to an urgent matter. He was heaven and earth to her and curiosity lured her to the throne room. From behind a curtain, she watched the proceedings. A young man, hardly more than a boy, had been dragged before the sultan. The accusation was treason. He had been found communicating with citizens of a neighboring country, with which there was a tense and hostile standstill after hundreds of years of warring.

The boy insisted that his betrothed lived there and he had only been trying to visit her. "We are both of the *Khaliji Beledi*," he pleaded. "When you captured that area, you forced a border through our community, and we found ourselves on opposite sides. I am a faithful subject, most-esteemed Sultan, but I must be faithful to my heart as well."

Fatima watched her father's face remain placid, even as he gave the order for the young man to be put to death. She couldn't help but gasp at the horror of it—the look on the boy's face. She didn't yet know love, but with the wisdom acquired through her years of silent observation, she recognized that his tortured expression

## Summer Island ~ A Tiara for the Taking

wasn't fear of death, but the agony of loss. Her father turned to where she had been hiding and approached the curtain. When he pulled it back and saw it was she, he smiled broadly.

He grasped her shoulders gently and pulled her to him. "Shall I race you back to the party, my *romm'an*?"

It was his pet name for her, from the fruit that grew all around the palace. He had said it reminded him of her because of its sweetness and because it was so much frustrating work to enjoy due to its innumerable and inedible ruby seeds. "But worth it, my *romm'an*," he would say. "Always."

Up until this moment, the endearment had filled Fatima with pride and love. It made her feel treasured. Now, having witnessed his casual cruelty, new feelings constricted her throat. She couldn't breathe. But she could run. She tore out of his embrace and ran up to the parapet where she knew she could be alone.

The guards looked high and low but no one could find her. For three days, she cried and fasted. When she materialized, it was as a different child, lethargic and melancholy. Her father reached for her, so grateful she was alive, but she walked past him as if in a trance. Days later, in desperation, because she continued to ignore him, he pleaded for her forgiveness. When that didn't work, he bellowed. When that failed, he threatened. Nothing had any effect on the girl. He was dead to her, just as she seemed dead to herself.

A year later, his daughter still wasn't speaking to him. The joy she had evoked in him withered and very little pleased him anymore. Other things had changed as well, including the fact that he now showed mercy when passing judgment on his subjects. Even though he knew she was nowhere near, he continually felt her watchful eyes. *Would she be proud of me?* he'd ask before he made a decision. It was a subconscious question and when his vizier asked him about the change in his demeanor he dismissed the notion entirely.

## The Legacy

It was one of these occasions of mercy that brought about a gift from a wealthy merchant whose life the sultan had spared. It was a collection of jewels. Their clarity was unsurpassed and the sultan found he was transfixed.

“Bring me the jeweler,” he whispered in desperate hope.

Ever since she was little, Fatima had loved shiny things. Once, when rummaging through palace drawers, she had come upon her mother’s ruby necklace. She wore it as a belt and screamed when her *amabs* tried to take it from her. The sultan prayed that the gift fashioned from these precious gems would at last move his daughter to have pity on him.

When the renowned jeweler Wahid Amin arrived at the palace, he was taken to one of the finest apartments, reserved for only the most elite visitors.

“Make this,” the vizier ordered, producing a child’s lopsided drawing the sultan had saved from years before, “or die.”

For weeks, Wahid sweated through every cut. If he broke one of the gems—a possibility determined solely by the jewel’s crystalline structure—he would undoubtedly perish. The delicious food provided by the palace cooks tasted like sand. The luxurious bed and silken clothes chafed against his skin. His only comfort was in the success of each minute cut. And in the end, he produced the most unique and glorious tiara the world would ever see.

Inspired by a child’s drawing, the ornament was not symmetrical. It struck the viewer as odd and disconcerting. And yet it was utterly hypnotic—so captivating that one was somehow transformed by it and never able to look at anything the same way again. It was almost as if the spectacular beauty ensnared the eye, but the strangeness of the gems’ placement made insistently clear that the way things had been before is not how they must remain forever.

## Summer Island ~ A Tiara for the Taking

And this was the effect it had on the sultan's daughter. When he presented it to her, she too was captivated. Fatima flew into his arms and they both wept unabashedly.

"Father?"

His heart bloomed. "Yes, my *romm'an?*"

She withdrew from his arms and looked at him with severe intensity. "Find me his betrothed."

She didn't wait for his reply, and didn't take the gift with her when she returned to the harem.

The young woman was easy enough to find, and a few days later, she was brought to the palace. After having been bathed and dressed to be worthy of presentment to the *amira*, she was taken to the girl's apartments.

"Bring me my tiara," Fatima ordered the guard, and when he returned, she dismissed him.

The sultan, who remained in the hallway, couldn't hear what passed between his daughter and the woman he knew in his heart he had wronged. When Fatima asked for him and he entered her sitting room, he saw the tiara resting in the wrong hands.

"Father, I have given my tiara to Hebba," the *amira* said with finality. "Now, *she* has something *you* want. Will you buy it back from her?"

Hebba stared at the ground, trembling with fear. Fatima's hands steadied her.

The sultan's wan expression was a result of the conflicting emotions at play in his heart. Shame, pride, love, vanity.

"Of course I will. Hebba, will ten thousand *dirham* be agreeable to you?"

Later, once the young woman regained consciousness, she found she had been safely delivered home to her family. In truth, they were so surprised that she had even come back that the magnitude of the wealth she had brought with her didn't register until the following morning.

## The Legacy

Fatima and her father were reconciled after that and neither of them ever mentioned their previous estrangement. As she grew, Fatima became even more of a recluse, spending most days in her scientific study of astronomy. The sultan's vizier cautioned against such indulgence. Even the sultan's mother, the valide sultana herself, urged her son to rein in his daughter, insisting "the girl should be married by now."

But the sultan never considered it. His daughter was happy and when she did come out of her study, to share with him her most recent discovery or theory, the light on her face convinced him even further. He would never take this from her.

And Fatima would come out on certain occasions, especially for those that were important to her father. On such evenings she would wear her tiara, since it had become legendary and she knew people were coming partly just to get a glimpse of the illustrious crown. It had become a symbol of peace and prosperity—a national treasure—representing the permanence of their dynasty.

So when it was stolen, it was more than just a financial loss. It exposed the sultan and, by association, the country as weak. Rumor spread across the land. Accusations were hurled, insinuations made, but the tiara could not be found.

Soon after Fatima's twenty-fifth birthday, her father died, with her and her mother at his side. And as he lay there, he once again apologized to her for failing to retrieve her tiara.

She assured him that it was only a symbol. "No one can ever steal what it represents, Father."

But her words fell upon ears that could no longer hear her voice.

Her brother, Achmed, struggled over how to handle the sister who had always puzzled him, but Kaamla, his first wife, had no qualms. A traditional woman to a fault, she didn't care about depriving her sister-in-law of her

## Summer Island ~ A Tiara for the Taking

joy. “Twenty-five is old, but not too old,” she pronounced. “You must find her a husband.”

Fatima, knowing what lay in store for her, packed a few things and departed. She joined the Sisters of Shadhili Tariqa, women who worked with the poorest of the poor. In the slums of the city, she spent the rest of her days studying and teaching. Fatima never saw her family again.

The communal grief over the death of their sultan devastated the people’s morale throughout the land. For many, it rekindled old fears and anger. Enemies tested the strength of the new sultan with skirmishes along the border. And in the far recesses of the people’s minds simmered the memory of the stolen tiara. It had been created in days of prosperity—a time when civility and national pride were present in every home and every public space. The absence of it gnawed at people’s hearts.



Now, hundreds of years later, after having been stolen and re-stolen with every conquest in Morocco’s history, the tiara had finally returned to its rightful owner—Malik Hazim, the grandson many times over of Achmed and Kaamla. When the news came, the tiara was coveted by all of the women in the royal family, although none dared ask for it outright.

When it was brought to his study, the *malik* had his secretary set it on the edge of his desk. Hazim was attending to more pressing matters, and it wasn’t until late that evening that he sat back, removed his reading glasses and took the box into his hands. In the back of his mind, since he knew the legend, he had impulsively wondered whether to give it to his daughter, rather than one of the older women, or even more sensibly to store it with the rest of the royal jewelry. He decided on the latter and proceeded to open the case.

## The Legacy

He knew that the tiara was remarkable, but what lay in the velvet-lined box was so far beyond that. He, like so many before him, was mesmerized. It didn't take long for him to realize that it looked like a picture his daughter might draw, and, abruptly changing his mind, he resolved to present it to her the next morning. Of course, no one was still alive who could remark on the similarities between the two girls—separated by three hundred years, but nearly identical both in temperament and affectations. Their relationships with their fathers were also alike, as there wasn't much Malik Hazim denied his precious *amira*.

When Amira Azeeza—a tiny girl with large serious eyes—placed the tiara on her head, it was too big and easily slipped halfway down her face. She looked nonplussed and immediately tried to ascertain the problem.

The *malik*, who held her in his arms, smiled at her bewilderment and embraced her. “You'll grow into it, my *romm'an*,” he assured.

But the tiara, which had spent too little time in its true home, didn't remain long. Before the world could see Amira Azeeza wear the famous *Fatima Tiara*, it had once again been stolen.