

You're unique, Fatima

Once there was Berber couple who lived in the desert. They spent their lives crossing it, over and over again. Sometimes they carried food and livestock from one oasis to the next. Or they guided travellers, who wanted to cross the sea of dunes without getting lost. The Berber couple loved living in the desert. The days were hot, and you needed a good sense of direction. But the nights were cool, and the stars shone brighter than anywhere else in the world.

The Berber couple had a daughter. She was a bright-eyed, lively girl, but when her mother and father saw her, they didn't know what name to give her. They thought and they thought, but they couldn't work out what to call her.

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"She doesn't look like an Amina, like her aunt," said her mother. "And I don't think she'd suit Zaida, after my grandmother," said her father. Or Nura, or Iris, or Jala, or Karima, or Rania. And neither one of them could think of a name that was beautiful enough for their little girl. And as one day followed another, time went by, and the girl grew up without a name.

One day, when she was seven years old, the girl asked her parents: "why don't I have a name?" Her mother and father told her that they hadn't found one they liked enough to give her, and the girl was very upset. She grew more and more downhearted, and since she didn't have a name, she began to become invisible. At first she just was a little blurry. But in the end, she was so transparent, that no one could see her.

How sad she felt. She asked herself "Why does everyone have a name and not me? Even my doll has a name – she's called Najat. Why can't I have one?"

But being invisible also had its advantages. She could see everything that everyone was doing, without being seen. Once she caught her friend Nasser saying "poo poo, pee pee," to his grandma. His grandma told him off. "You mustn't say those naughty words," but the girl saw that she was laughing under her breath. She also found out that Hassan was very proud of his camel, and when he thought no one could see him, he told it it was the cleverest camel he'd ever known, and if it were up to him, he would build a monument to the best camel in the world.

Then one day, the little girl became so invisible, that she got lost. "Daughter!" When her mother and father realized they were very sad. They called for her desperately: "Girl!" / "Daughter!" But the girl did not appear. How the girls' mother and father wept. "Nothing will ever replace her", said her mother. "We've made a great mistake," said

her father. “We thought she had to have a special name, and we forgot that the most special thing of all was her.”

“She was our daughter and she was unique.” As soon as her mother said that word, the girl appeared at their side. They were overjoyed to be able to hug her again.

“Forgive us,” said her mother.

“We love you very much and we don’t want you to disappear again,” said her father.

That very night, they decided to call the girl Fatima. Fatima means “unique”, and also “shining one”. And to their parents, children are never anything less than unique.

When Fatima grew up, she was a very happy young woman. She continued to cross the desert with her parents, and from the days when she didn’t have a name she had learned a skill that’s known to very few. Whenever she wanted, she could make herself fade away, as if by magic. And when anyone called her name, she appeared, shining and beautiful. Like a mirage in the desert - but real.

Script: Carme Aymerich