

THE NOTEBOOK

For a long time the notebook went unnoticed so that when finally she came across it again by chance she could not recall how it came to be tucked into her bookshelf. Even then it lay discarded for days until her eye fell upon it again and she casually pushed it into her coat. From then on she was unable to live without it.

She became aware of its power the very first time she wrote in it. The mere act of writing seemed to unlock a door in her mind. Magically, the notebook appeared capable of summoning onto its clear white pages the solution to any problem she had been wrestling with. The difficulties in her life unknotted themselves effortlessly. It proved capable of lending itself to any problem. Quandries that had plagued her for months, sometimes years, were resolved in a few words jotted down without apparent effort, sitting on a bus, say, or waiting in a café. She carried it with her everywhere.

Finally, the inevitable happened and she reached the last page. It came at a particularly difficult moment for her. She knew she needed to find a replacement but soon discovered, entering one stationer's after another and seeing their expressions as they turned

it over before carefully setting it down on the counter and shaking their heads, that it was not going to be an easy task. Alternatives were found and she dutifully tried one after another. The results only seemed to further complicate her situation. She had to have an identical notebook.

Then one day she wandered into a novelty shop, its windows crowded with every manner of object: Alarm clocks shaped like golden temples, umbrellas that glowed in the dark. She did not hold out much hope she would find what she was searching for, until, as she made to leave, she noticed the young man sitting behind the counter. He was bent over a notebook that looked remarkably like hers. Drawing closer, she craned her neck to glimpse what he was writing. To her disappointment she saw a page covered with indecipherable squiggles, characters in a language she did not understand. But when she glanced up she found herself gazing into his eyes. In his wonderous look of astonishment she knew what he had written there on the page. She was the solution to his dilemma and without the notebook they would never have found one another.

A story by **Jamal Mahjoub**