



## STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

### MIJA (ENGLISH) – 308: Binty

[0:05]

Ten minutes is very little time.

But in those ten minutes, you've discovered the ins and outs of my family,

Their joys, and their sorrows

[0:15]

You've laughed

maybe cried.

And heard the stories of this immigrant family from me.

[0:21]

Now that you've heard all about them

I want to tell you about me.

And how I became Mija, or "Binty" in Arabic, *bil 3arabi*.

[0:30]

I am the daughter of those alive, those long gone and those still dreaming.

And here's what you need to know about me:

I am Egyptian

[0:40]

Which means, I wear my heart on my sleeve,

I'm honest,

Forgiving

And a little loud.

[0:48]

And I loveeee telling stories, especially dramatic ones

I am my mother's daughter. I am Mija.

So, here we go: ten minutes to tell you my story.

[1:15]

I am 2 years old, holding Mona's hand,

walking through a street market in Alexandria

I hear men and women, yelling and laughing,

and living.

[1:26]

It is a sweet symphony of chaos

To my young ears.

You see, despite their years abroad,  
Abdou and Mona go back to Egypt often.

[1:37]

After Omar was born, they went back for a whole month  
And every year after that, we would go back,  
And stay at our grandparent's homes in Alexandria.

[1:47]

They wanted the first sounds Omar and I could remember  
To be those of their home. Of EL BEIT.  
Every morning we ate fuul medames and falafel  
washed down with a steaming hot cup of shay bilaban, milk and tea.

[2:05]

Omar and I would devour it along with freshly baked bread.  
We would stand on long lines to fetch aish baladi, pita bread every morning.  
Then we would go play in front of the house as my aunt watched over us from the balcony,  
cigarette in hand, gossiping with other women on the block.

[2:31]

When we would come back to London,  
The hot breezes of Egypt's coast  
Were replaced by this:  
But they quickly became:

[2:56]

Because when we weren't in Egypt,  
Abdou and Mona brought Egypt to us.

[3:06]

That said, we still grew up in London.  
And in the early 2000s  
All I saw of Arabs on western TV were terrorists, sheikhs and exotic dancers.  
And at school, when the teachers talked about North Africa

[3:27]

They'd ask us what it was like..  
Even though we were born and raised in the UK!  
So I straightened my curls and tried to speak "proper English"  
making sure my Arabic didn't slip out when I was out and about.

[3:41]

I assimilated. Hard.  
But Mona forbade English at home so we wouldn't forget our mother tongue.

[3:55]

And at one point, when Omar got too into watching hip hop videos,  
Abdou says we could only watch Arab TV for a whole month.

They were always worried we'd forget who we were.

[4:10]

As we grew older, we thought they were being a little crazy.

But when Omar left for New York, you bet the things he missed the most were  
Abdou's music and Mona's incense.

[4:21]

In fact, for his first birthday away from home,

I gave him a Walkman with a mix CD full of Abdou's music  
for the long train rides home.

[4:38]

When he left, a lot changed for me.

I was expected to be the exemplary British- Egyptian daughter:  
Home by 7 for dinner.

[4:48]

Become a doctor or a lawyer.

Have a real career.

Reminded constantly of 'what others might think' of my actions.

After Omar left,

Over breakfast, Abdou would say: "Don't disappoint me like your brother.

[5:09]

Find a good job, and marry a good Muslim man it's all I ask.”

Mona didn't say much at these moments,

Except that she'd heard Omar was doing just fine.

At the same time, I was struggling to come to terms with who I was

[5:28]

As a young Muslim woman,

In a very anti-Muslim society.

I began wearing the veil at age 15.

[5:38]

It was a choice I made myself to feel closer to God.

But it came with a lot of changes too.

One summer, while walking down regents street in London with a friend,

A man pulled off my hijab right there in the street.

[5:56]

I didn't know what to do.

I was so speechless.

As my friend yelled and chased him down,

A fellow Muslim woman saw and covered me with her cardigan while I pulled it back on.

[6:10]

It changed everything for me.

I felt violated.

And yet,

When I went home

Mona and I prayed together.

[6:20]

And it gave me strength.

I knew then that everything would be okay.

But I was still afraid, afraid to follow my dreams, afraid to be fully myself.

[6:33]

I pass my A levels. And apply to Uni.

Omar's weekly calls made New York sound like a dream.

So despite my fears, I secretly applied to Parsons New School, for a fashion degree.

[6:49]

That's right, I followed in Grandpa Marzouk's footsteps.

I always admired how his old hands could manipulate such delicate fabrics.

But what really got me, was this:

[7:02]

Marzouk was also really worried we'd lose sight of who we were

On like a whole other level.

When I was born, he started making scarves for me.

[7:12]

One for each birthday

With hieroglyphics on it.

Each time we went back home,

[7:17]

I'd wait impatiently as he sewed another symbol onto each.

Slowly a message started to appear.

He did it every year until I turned 18.

[7:30]

When he finished it, it was around when I got my acceptance letters.

The world was my oyster. I could stay in England, or go to Egypt, or go to New York.

I had no idea what to do. I was so frustrated that I took Marzouk's scarves and threw them in the air!

[7:48]

When they landed, I started to see this message:

*The life you lead will not be easy, but as my youngest grandchild my greatest desire for you is that you follow your dreams, and have a full and happy life, with the ones you love. Wherever you are in the world, know that Allah is watching over you.*

[8:16]

So I moved to New York to do just that.



With Marzouk's scarves, Dawlat's strength, Mona's incense, and Abdou's Music. Sherif's and Omar's courage and the love and support of my ancestors. I left.

I arrived at JFK to find Omar waiting for me with his new fiancé.

[8:41]

That first night they took me out to a nice restaurant in the village

We laughed and caught up...

But like Gidda when she first arrived in London,

[8:50]

I felt like something was missing.

I told Omar to take me to a place where I could hear our music.

And he laughed.

[8:58]

He said, that's an hour away.

I said I didn't care.

So we hopped on the A train, switched to the R

[9:08]

And got off on Steinway Street:

Little Egypt.

[9:13]

After graduation, I apprenticed with a local designer

To design clothes that integrated both of my identities

[9:20]

- as a Muslim and Egyptian woman.

And I never left.

That was 12 years ago.

[9:30]

Nothing like the hijab incident happened to me in New York.

But not everything was always so rosy...

[9:39]

Imagine a worn-out flat screen TV perched in the back corner of a café in Queens, New York.

Below it, a couple is smoking a hookah together.

[9:49]

They laugh.

I'm drinking tea on the other side of the café, looking at my phone, distractedly.

The shop owner tunes to one of the local news channels.

[10:02]

And suddenly the laughter starts to fade.

[10:23]

Our eyes are all glued to the screen as the unimaginable is announced.  
My tea is getting cold. And my phone won't stop buzzing with messages.

[10:41]

That night I light incense and collapse on the couch.

I take a deep breath.

The smell of incense fills the house.

It is the same smell that is here now, in New York.

[10:58]

I call EL BEIT. they take a while to answer, but when they do:

*Abdou, Mona, Marzouk, Dawalt, Sherif, Omar.. Everyone's faces light up on the tiny screen.  
Omar laughs at Sherif's joke, Gidda Dalwat can't focus her face properly on the phone, Abdou  
and Mona squeeze their faces together to fit in.*

[11:24]

*Soon more members of the family join in: those alive, those long gone and those still dreaming.*

*I see my eyes in their eyes.*

*My smile in theirs.*

[11:39]

*They all say:*

*Everything will be fine, InshAllah, God willing.*

[11:50]

*And it would be,*

*After all,*

*I'm still here, aren't I?*

**FINAL DEL EPISODIO**