



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA (ENGLISH) – 303: Gidda Dawlat

[0:05]

Hi, I'm Mija, or Binty, in Arabic. And this podcast is about my family. Those alive, those long gone, and those who are still dreaming.

Now, this is what you need to know about Gidda Dawlat, my grandmother -
she loves knowing other cultures,

[0:27]

she's an excellent cook

she's an optimist

and she can tell the future.

[0:35]

Dawlat is my grandmother, Baba Abdou's mom.

So, here it goes - ten minutes to tell her story.

Dawlat grows up in a big family of 11 brothers and sisters, in Alexandria.

[1:00]

She's one of the older sisters.

So naturally she grows up with a *huge* sense of responsibility.

She's like a second mom - helping to raise the rest of her siblings.

[1:11]

While her mother runs errands, Dawlat makes sure that her siblings pray, get dressed, eat breakfast and are lined up for school in uniforms.

Dawlat loves her family deeply.

Still at times,

[1:29]

It gets a little crazy in their small home

And at those times, Dawlat takes a walk through the streets of Alexandria, and makes her way to the port.

[1:51]

At age 15, seeing those boats is fascinating.

She watches the seamen working on ships and boats full of goods

[1:59]

Coming from who knows where, going to who knows where, carrying who knows what.

So Dawlat's mind is always wandering.

She breathes in the fresh salt water air and imagines herself on a boat traveling too, far across the Mediterranean Sea.

[2:22]

But then of course, she snaps out of it and remembers her errands at home.

Then years later, Dawlat is at the same port...

and for the first time, she notices a man. He's younger than Dawlat.

[2:38]

He appears to buy and sell cotton in the port.

They lock eyes.

And one day at the pier, he comes and talks to her.

[2:50]

He presents himself - "My name is Mohammed, and I'm a trader", he says

Dawlat sees in his eyes the man she wants to marry.

And eventually she does.

[3:09]

As soon as they move to their new house in Al Ibrahmiya, a neighborhood in Alexandria, Dawlat starts to live a different lifestyle.

A lifestyle with no financial worries, a life of opulence and luxury.

In this home, Dawlat gives birth to four children, including Abdou, my dad.

[3:30]

Those first years, Dawlat raises them as she would have never dreamed - with comfort, time and patience.

And that's because Mohammed has two stable businesses -

A cotton trade at one of Alexandria's main ports,

[3:46]

And he also owns several tourism boats along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea

The boats always take English people up and down the coast...

[3:57]

and Mohammed always comes home with stories from his clients,

stories about England, or France, or Greece...

Dawlat listens to them attentively,

fascinated by his tales.

[4:11]

She loves her husband and admires all of his efforts

but there's something that upsets her

[4:21]

Mohammed is so proud of everything he gives to his family that he wants *everyone* to know about it.

Literally, every one

So he organizes huge parties in his house to show, well, everyone, what he accomplishes.

[4:40]

People from all over the city came over to Dawlat's home. Also people from other parts of Egypt and Europe.

During those parties, Dawlat and Abdou would stay in another room, listening to the chatter.

[4:54]

In those moments, Dawlat tells her son:

“I’m afraid someone might cast *hasad* on your dad, Abdou.”

Abdou understands his mother's worry.

[5:13]

‘Cause Mohammad wasn’t being very discreet about his wealth.

A few days after one of those parties, Mohammed comes back home with intense stomach pain.

[5:24]

And in less than a day, he leaves this world.

He left so quickly that Dawlat had no doubt it was the work of the *hasad*.

That same week, Dawlat feels burdened with sadness and happiness at the same time -

Because she finds out she’s pregnant with her fourth child.

[5:53]

Gidda Dawlat holds her head up high and raises her children on her own.

She keeps Mohammed’s tourism business afloat for a while, with only one boat.

[6:04]

It’s a lot of work, and Dawlat is exhausted.

But she keeps a smile on her face because she is never really alone.

The women in her community help her take care of her children when she's out at work.

[6:20]

The community she thrives on is like her family - in good times and in bad times.

Seven days after giving birth to her fourth son,

the women of the neighborhood accompanied Dawlat in the Sebou3 ritual

to give him a warm welcome.

[6:44]

As every attendee hits their pots and pans

for the newborn to be aware of the world around him,

Dawlat puts an earring on his right ear.

She whispers in the boy's ear: "May you be protected, and have a prosperous life."

[7:06]

Abdou's younger brother is a few weeks old when Abdou starts noticing his mother's fatigue.

He sees it in her eyes and in the way she falls asleep quickly when she sits anywhere.

So Abdou makes a vow.

[7:19]

Every day after school he would go straight to work to help his mom with the boat.

And so he does.

He leaves school, heads up to one of the piers at the sea, gets in the boat and sings and plays the oud for the tourists...

[7:41]

Abdou is a young man. He kisses his mother's hand every morning before going to work.

Abdou dreams of having a family on his own and taking care of them like his mother has always done FOR HIM.

[7:53]

That's why it's so hard for Abdou to move to the UK with Mona years later.

The day Abdou calls to say he's leaving, a sense of loneliness overwhelms Dawlat.

"WHAAAT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU'RE LEAVING? What's going to happen with the boat? What's going to happen with you? I'll be here all by myself..." she says

[8:16]

But something makes her change her mind.

One night, she has a dream. In it, she gives Abdou her husband Mohammed's Quran. And Mohammed gives his son a blessing.

Dawlat wakes up to fulfill both parents' wishes.

[8:37]

She says to Abdou - "London is a bridge to the world.

Go on, and travel for me!"

[8:52]

Dawlat does fulfill her wish of travelling too.

As soon as they move to the UK, she visits her son and his wife.

One one of her first visits,

Abdou and Mona take her to the best London *high tea* experience...

[9:07]

...and Dawlat, well, she laughs at what she sees.

Tiny croquettes and donuts,

Tiny sandwiches and pies,

Tiny *everything!*

[9:19]

From then on, everytime Gidda comes to London, she only has coffee.

On one particular visit, she serves Abdou a cuppa

He drinks it.

[9:32]

Dawlat looks at the grounds and reads the future.

She tells him that Mona will have a child soon. Very soon.

And that the child will be a rebel.

[9:53]

She also says something to warn Abdou - "Do not impose your own ways"

In London, Abdou speaks to Gidda on the phone everyday.

Especially those first few months

[10:11]

When he feels far from home, Gidda tells him to stay positive,

And to go for long walks to explore.

[10:21]

Abdou asks Gidda - "Mom, where should I go today?"

And she says: "Walk one block to the right, go straight two blocks, and then turn left." Just like that.

Abdou always thinks he's walking nowhere, but he has fun anyway.

[10:39]

Until one day, thanks to Gidda's instructions, he finds the Egyptian neighborhood in London Ealing. Arab words float in the air as he looks around him.

He sees the Eye Of Horus stamped on a building.

[10:52]

"I've found my place!", he exclaims to no one in particular.

And so it is then that Abdou makes his first investment for his own restaurant, in London.

Gidda lives in Egypt, and my brother Omar and I live in London and New York.

[11:12]

But that doesn't mean we don't see each other.

On the contrary - we visit her every time we can and she always takes us to the sea.

She always observes the horizon intensely.

[11:27]

When we were little, Omar and I made a little fun of that, I have to admit it.

Our mouths full of her famous oras cookies.

And Gidda always told us that, if we missed her,

we could stare at the horizon as she does.

So we'll see her smiling on the other side of the world!

[11:47]

Later, when Omar tells Gidda he's going to New York to dance... Gidda laughs

"Just remember who you are, and that you could get *hasad* casted on you any minute.

[11:59]

I'll be watching over you. So when you head over to the Brooklyn Bridge, look closely, and you'll see me!"

Today, every time Omar misses Gidda's cookies

her grandchild stares at the horizon over the Brooklyn Bridge and swears he can see her in the heavens every time.

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