Part 1: Al-Ahmaloo (The Hope)

*A feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen*, that’s the official definition of hope. Of course, in reality the meaning is far deeper than that. Without something to hope for, what is the point of living? The thing I hoped for most, was someone to love. For as long as I can remember I have always been the type to “catch feelings” for girls. So basically, I have always been a hopeless romantic, with complete hope that one day I would find my soulmate and we would fall in love and the world would be a little less lonely than before. To this day I can remember the first time I felt a type of way about a girl, not that at that tender age I could even comprehend what the words “crush” or “feelings” meant. This first part is about one of my more notable childhood crushes, and how she would eventually change my life, and I am still deciding if it is for the better or worse. I guess our story starts where most childhood friendships start, with our families being friends. This meant at most gatherings she was there. I still remember getting a weird, nervous feeling in my stomach every time she was around, crazy right? Despite that craziness, however, I still remember being with her and my cousins and “playing” those games we all played as children. *Cops and robbers, hide and seek, touchers etc*­. Of course, to the innocent mind of a child, that anxious/nervous feeling in my stomach didn’t really mean much and so I continued focusing on the games and my favorite video game of all time, *Crash Bandicoot*, which always held my attention at Spur while they did God knows what. I can honestly say that a part of me has always, and probably will always, associate Spur and Crash Bandicoot with *her (*hopefully no future girlfriend prospects read this otherwise I’ll be banned from my favourite restaurant and game) So that’s how it went for a while, I’m not sure how long exactly, until, as it always does, life happened. Our families had a fallout, the details of which are too personal to share with the world, and that was that. I can’t say that her absence in my life affected me in any way, I mean I was just an 8 year old after all. The years went by, I grew up a little and so did she. True to form, feelings for other girls came and went. Some staying longer than others. I had a few girlfriends along the way, but as a teenager none of those were serious in any way. And that was life. Until one day I received a message on Facebook which read “Hey sweetz, remember me?” and I replied in the most honest way I possibly could, *Who could forget?* And that sparked an interesting phase in our relationship. Obviously at the time neither of us could have really guessed just how much those two messages would impact our lives. Because from those two messages came frequent conversations, walls being broken down, and connections which I had never experienced before, forming. This girl, who I had known many years ago, had now become my best friend. Even though we never saw each other, she felt closer than most. As an introvert, those sort of connections were rare to me, and yet I couldn’t stop this one. Eventually, as in a lot of boy-girl best-friendships, deeper feelings developed. This, unfortunately, brought along a lot of jealousy, and regrettably, a lot of hurt. If *you* ever read this, I am truly sorry for all of it. We even stopped speaking for a few months at a time, yet somehow one of us would always find our way back to the other, and the other was always willing to welcome them back. Maybe if I had just left *you* alone, things would have been different. For about four years, this on again off again friendship was our relationship. Until one year, I found my way back to her yet again and things took a different turn, our conversations took a different turn. Feelings I didn’t even know I had for her started showing themselves. Unfortunately I had eyes for another girl and wound up hurting her, again. *I’m sorry.* If you had asked me at that point, 4 years ago, if I saw a future with her I probably would have said something like *I’ve hurt her too many times, she’ll never talk to me again.* And yet, a few months later I messaged her again. And surprisingly, she took me in, again. This time was completely different, I was fully invested in it, and so was she. For the first time since our first messages on Facebook, we made plans to meet up and actually stuck to it. I went to her house and as my father pulled up he recognized the house. “Do you remember this house?” he said, “Do you remember coming here?” However it did not seem familiar to me. I went in and I couldn’t believe, four years later, we were finally together. This girl I had shared the most intimate parts of myself with and I, finally together in the same room. I still remember the feelings of excitement and nervousness I felt. I still remember what movie was playing on tv, *The Hunger Games*. I remember feeling so comfortable that eventually all the nervousness seemed to go. I remember sitting next to her, and just talking. I remember the first time we kissed. I remember her taking the ring I was wearing on my right fourth finger. I remember smoking a pipe with her and her cousin. I remember my father coming to pick me up, and not wanting to leave. After that, things just seemed to fall into place, we had our first date, I re-met her mother, she re-met my parents, we started dating. And it seemed like my lifelong hope was finally coming into fruition. It seemed perfect for a while, until it stopped. I don’t know why, but jealousy began to take over me. Not only of other guys, but also other people in her life. I began to feel insecure, something which I couldn’t understand as it was completely new to me. I don’t consider myself a very intelligent person, but considering my logic centric degree along with my longtime interest in the world around me as well as the cosmos above me, I had a somewhat decent understanding of my external world and yet despite this, I had a poor understanding of my internal world. This killed me. This jealousy led to fights. I had certain expectations and so did she, which led to more fights. Eventually we got to a point where we loved each other more than we were in love with each other. My hope slowly fading. I remember my biggest insecurity had come to life; she was talking to another guy. In her defense I believe it was just friendly at the time but it killed me. I remember sitting on the bus one day, going home from university, and asking her if she had feelings for him. *I don’t know, she said.* I was sitting down, but I swear I felt light headed. Everything around me seemed to be spinning. The words *I don’t know* playing in my mind over and over again. Driving me insane. Despite the disorientation I knew what I had to do, “I’ll come to you tonight and we can break up” my next text read. I don’t even remember driving there that night. I just remember sitting on the couch, that same couch where we had our first kiss, and holding her as she cried on my shoulder. She cried her heart out. I tried convincing myself it was for the best, though. After a while, she went to get something and when she came back she opened my hand and put the ring in it. I knew it was over. I don’t remember driving home that night either. I do remember the weeks that followed, though. We said we’d stay friends and I actually visited her again once. It was different though. That night when I got home I told her I don’t think we can be friends anymore. It was too hard, knowing that the girl I loved, was talking to someone else. It was also the night I got introduced to the song which even now, 3 years later, is one of my favorite songs, *Sinner by Phora.* Something very important I’ve learned the hard way actually comes from a quote I like, *Learn to let go of anything that no longer benefits you.* Based on personal experience and what I’ve seen in others around me, this is a difficult skill to learn. I think maybe it’s because we don’t want to believe that we gave our best to someone, and it wasn’t good enough, *but sometimes it isn’t.* It also took me a long time to accept the role I played in the relationships end, and an even longer time to forgive myself. It’s funny thinking about it now, the girl who gave me hope, was the same one who destroyed it.

Part 2: Al-iiman (The faith)

This second part actually interconnects a lot with part 1, a lot more than I originally thought. This story revolves around a different type of relationship. For a long time, I had faith that this girl and I would end up together. We met in high school and from the first time I met her, I had a big crush on her. She was actually one of the girls who caused some of the jealousy I spoke about in part 1. Not that she could ever know that. The reason I had faith that we’d end up together was that I always seemed to come back to my crush on her. I never knew what it was, I still don’t, but something about her intrigued me so much. Let me explain a bit further what I mean. Like I said, after meeting her I had a crush on her, and then I had a crush on another girl (also the cause of much jealousy in part 1) for about 2 years, and then there was her again, and then another two girls, and then her again. It was after my last year of high school that I thought I was over her. And yet, the following year she was the reason I hurt the girl from part 1. It’s actually quite funny how these two different parts in my life are so interconnected. So for another year I was again chasing after this girl. Despite my feelings, however, we were actually quite close as friends, I don’t know how to explain it but we just really got along as friends. There were a few other girls in that year, but it was always her I wanted. The end of the year came and I guess I realised that we were better off as friends. It was actually at that point I also realised I had let go of someone I really cared about and could have a potential future with, for something that would probably never happen. And that was the beginning of my realization of my true feelings for the girl in part 1. It’s funny how things work out. And that was it, I had let my feelings for her go and instead explored my feelings for my childhood crush. Towards the end of my relationship, though, I ran into this girl again and we had made plans to meet up the following week. I remember we were speaking about a show we both liked called *How I met your mother* and how I related so much to the main character Ted, who spent the entire show searching for his soulmate. Shortly after that my relationship had ended but this girl and I had started spending more time together and the feelings I thought I had let go of suddenly found their way back. My faith was restored. I was so sure that this was a sign that things were going to work out, given the timing of it all. I learned another important lesson the hard way, again. This time it actually came from Ted, when he said “*maybe it's dumb to look for the signs from the universe! Maybe the universe has better things to do. I mean, dear God, I hope it does. You know how many signs I've gotten, that I should or shouldn't be with someone? And where has it gotten me? Maybe there aren't any signs. Maybe... maybe a locket's just a locket, and a chair's just a chair. Maybe we don't have to give meaning to every little thing. And maybe we don't... Maybe we don't need the universe to tell us what we really want. Maybe we already know that. Deep down*” This quote actually spoke to me a lot because he was saying this to a girl who he also had faith would be the one he’d end up with (in his case, though, he eventually did end up with her) In her defense however, something might have come of us, if I hadn’t met the next girl, the girl who completely changed my life…but that’s getting ahead of the story. I hope this girl and I stay friends for a long time, though, and maybe one day when we’re old and married (if I ever get married, that is) I’ll ask her about it, if she ever thought we could be something more.

Part 3: Almasir (The desiny)

This story is the hardest for me to write. Not only because it is the most recent, but also because it had the biggest impact on me. It has changed me, but we’ll get to that. This story ties in with the first two parts in an almost perfect way. See, after I had broken up with my childhood crush and was back to crushing on the girl in part 2, I met this girl. The way we met is actually like something out of a movie. One of my friends (the same one who introduced me to Sinner) had met this girl and her friend while studying one day and when he found out they were doing the same subject I had passed the year before, he told them they should ask me for some help. So he gave them my number and he also gave me theirs. At this point, however, I was still dating the girl in part 1. So time went on and I grew curious to find out who these girls are. Eventually, in ways I won’t mention here, I found out who they were. Funny enough, this girl was actually someone I used to see in my math class and found very attractive. One day, when I was single again, I got a message from her asking if I still had my notes for that subject and we agreed to meet so that I could give them the notes. I don’t know why, but I suggested meeting instead of emailing her. If I had emailed her, maybe things would have been so different. I still remember the day we first met. We actually had on the same colour t shirts, jeans and shoes. She came into the computer labs with me, where I was sitting with one of my other friends, and I copied the notes. We spoke, and it was weirdly comfortable. I usually don’t have conversations with people I don’t know, because I’m such a loner, but I found it very easy to talk to this girl. When she left my friend and I had a conversation about her and I told him how we started speaking. After that day I really wanted to get to know this girl so I kept trying to make plans with her. Every time, though, it seemed like she had a different excuse. I later found out, however, that they weren’t actually excuses. Eventually I decided to give up trying, keep in mind though that at this time I was also meeting up with the girl in part 2 quite a bit, which is why I said maybe something could have happened, if things worked out differently. One Friday night, the girl in part 2 wasn’t available to chill with my cousins and I so I decided to try again with this girl, *Tell me I’m ugly* I told them (something we tell each other when we need some confidence) I messaged her and to my surprise we made plans for Monday. Monday came and we met up and it was so comfortable, we just smoked and spoke for a while but eventually I had to go to my next class, I remember wanting to skip it (something I did frequently anyway) but she convinced me to go. Looking back, I should have skipped it because I don’t even remember what class it was, let alone what I learnt, but I do remember her. After that day the next time we met up, we went out with some of my friends. I remember seeing her for the first time that night, she looked so beautiful, it felt like my heart would explode. The night went on, we all smoked, spoke, played a few games of pool and danced. When it was time to leave I remember asking one of my friends if I should kiss her, and he said not yet, I should ask her out on a date first. So as we were leaving I told one of my other friends the plan and he told the others to fall back. I walked her to her car, and we stood there speaking. I wanted to ask her out, but I was so nervous. Eventually I told myself I’m ugly and did it. *Uhhhh, yeah sure* she replied. And I joked that she sounded so unsure. My friends came out and we all left. I remember our first date perfectly, we went for pizza at this candle-lit pizza place and afterwards we went to walk around the university (that’s where I left my car) I remember wanting to kiss her so badly, but feeling so nervous. Eventually she said “What would you do if I were to kiss you right now?” and I looked into her eyes and pulled her towards me and we kissed. It was almost like magic. After that night we started spending a lot more time together. And eventually we became a couple. Things were perfect, to say the least. I won’t get into too much detail because I believe some of it should stay just for us. I remember thinking *It must be destiny* because of how perfect it was. I remember the first time we said I love you to each other, she said it first but I meant it more, or at least *I* believe I did. All good things come to an end though, or that’s how the saying goes. You see, when you start dating someone you want to spend all your time with them, you forget about everyone else in your life (unintentionally of course) but another very important lesson I learned the hardest way is that absence really *does* make the heart grow fonder (not that we didn’t love each other, because we did). What I learned was that the more time you spend with someone, especially someone you love, the more space you leave for jealousy and insecurity. Yes, the green eyed monster I thought I had buried long ago had come back to haunt me. This time was different though, I tried to fight it, I tried to beat it. And I did. But it was too late, my inner demon had found its way to her. If *you* ever read this I’m really sorry, I hope you can forgive me one day. Eventually our jealousy and insecurities led to fights and fights and more fights. Again, I won’t get into too much detail because some things are just for us. We stayed together, though. Through all the break ups, through all the fights, through everything. We stayed together. Sometimes I wish we hadn’t, sometimes I feel as though it would have been a little bit easier if we hadn’t gotten back together after the first break up. I tried to remember the lesson, *Learn to let go of things that no longer benefit you.* The problem was that when things were bad, they were really bad, but when things were good, they were so good that it was easy to forget the bad, no matter how bad it got. So we held on, we fought to stay together. We had promised each other once that we would always keep fighting. That we would never give up on each other. I realize now, however, that isn’t a fair promise to make. Not to someone else, and not to yourself. Because sometimes, no matter how much it breaks you, you have to let go. That’s just how life is, and unfortunately we can’t do anything about it. I love her, and I think a part of me always will. I can’t even begin to describe the pain I go through on a daily basis… I can’t go on with this one, I’m sorry. It’s too much…

Part 4: Altatawur (The evolution)

If you’ve made it this far, you probably can relate to at least one of these stories (if you can relate to all 3, I am truly sorry for your pain) When I started writing this story, I wasn’t sure what the purpose was, but now that I’ve reached the end, I realise that I needed to become the person I need. If you take away anything from this story, I hope it’s that you need to be strong for yourself. You need to know when to stop putting other people before yourself. You need to fight for you because if you don’t, who else will? There’s only so much that other people can do for you, but your strength and your support needs to come from within. Another reason is that I feel there is no one I can talk to about it. People only listen to your story so many times before they get tired and tell you to “just move on already”, but they don’t understand. There is no moving on. Sometimes I wish I still had my best friend, I feel like she is the only person I could talk to. I still check up on her now and then and she seems happy, but it also seems like there is no place in her life for me anymore. Ted from How I met your mother once said *When you care about someone, you should want them to be happy, even if you wind up being left out,* and for me that applies to all three of these girls I care about, I want them to be happy. I am not a particularly religious person, I was born a Christian but now I am an agnostic. The reason I chose Arabic names for the titles, is that out of all the languages I’ve learnt, Arabic is the most beautiful for me. I do not usually pray much but after my hope was crushed, my faith shaken and my idea of destiny distorted, I pray every single day. I hope God listens. Something that has intrigued me recently is evolution. Whether you believe in creationism or the theory of evolution, there is a universal truth that you must accept; all living organisms evolve. Some of these evolutions happen very slowly, to a whole species whereas some of these happen over a relatively short period of time, to individuals. Think about what happens if you stay in the bath or a pool for a long time, your fingertips get wrinkly, this is to allow us to have better grip underwater. This is an example of an evolution that happens relatively quickly, to individuals in a population. Another type of this evolution is going through something that changes you. Something that can make a guy who believed in love his whole life question if it’s even a real thing, or just something we humans made up. Something that makes a guy who spent years searching for a soulmate, not even think that such a thing exists anymore. Something that can turn a guy who was friendly to most people he met, into a cold person. Everyone blames the “fuck boy” for being what he is, but no one ever stops to ask him about the time he got his heart broken. The name of this story is a semi colon. In pieces of writing the semi colon represents the fact that the author had intended to end a sentence but chose to instead continue. These days it has a different meaning, these days it is worn as tattoo, symbolic of the fact that the wearer had intended to end his/her life but chose instead to live, to keep living, to hope for a better tomorrow. Tonight, as I sit outside in this cold winter evening, with my tear-filled eyes, smoking this pipe, sipping my now-cold tea, I realise that’s what it means to me.

Yours Truly

Andrew Johnson (A.J)