

SOON TOGETHER, NEVER PARTED

CONTINENTS APART

DANA SUDBORO



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Dana Sudboro

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

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Dedication

To Jennifer Hamilton. Every writer needs a critic and coach of her insight and persistence.

Praise for *Fatima's Fate*

Romance Studio – 4 Hearts - This is my first read by Dana Sudboro. He wrote a very interesting, fast-paced book which kept me involved from beginning to end. His characters were vividly written. They were all different and he focused well on their diversities. He made the men (and their families/friends) come alive. It seemed there would be no happily ever after. The ending was a surprise to me. I totally did not expect the reactions. I recommend this book as one appropriate for anyone to read. I will definitely look for this author again.

~ Brenda Talley ~

You Gotta Read Reviews - Mr. Sudboro's dialogue is sometimes light and humorous, other times intense and poignant and always beautifully written. I fell in love with his characters and found such peace by the end of this story. It is for these reasons and more that *Fatima's Fate* is such an entertaining book, and true joy to read.

~ Antonia ~

Long And Short Reviews – 4 Books - The story shows the difference between two cultures in a very sympathetic way. Fatima's inner turmoil adds tension to the story and moves the reader along at a reasonable pace. *Fatima's Fate* is pleasant to read and touches on a subject which must arise quite often in today's fast moving world.

~ Orchid ~

Prologue

*Poor deluded soul, which of the sheik's wives is she?
Second? Third?*

Xavier Sand tried not to stare. A desert-bronzed American woman, late twenties, milk chocolate eyes—spoke in hushed tones to a fortyish man in a blue turban.

That's strange. He wears the veil, not her.

It loosely covered the lower half of his face as if to keep wind-borne sand from entering his nose or mouth. But the present storm pelted the airport windows with water and drenched the tarmac beyond. Shafts of lightning split the gray Chicago sky and reminded the waiting passengers that it'd be a long time before flights resumed.

Xavier slouched in the seat and continued to track the woman's movements with his peripheral vision. Clearly she belonged to this desert nomad—her whole deferential manner attested to it—the way she examined his boarding pass, asked questions at the check-in counter, and reported back. Not to mention her ankle-length dress and long black scarf.

What snared her? His wealth? Power? Certainly not his looks.

The man's cheeks, nose, and brows looked clumpy like a camel's. *Strange, he doesn't seem too suave or commanding—nothing to mesmerize an impressionable*

female—more like bewildered. Has he never flown before?

The woman glanced Xavier's way and smiled shyly with a trace of dimples. Xavier averted his gaze, embarrassed that he'd been caught staring.

What's come over me?

No girl had captured his curiosity since Tamiko. He banished the painful memory and looked down at his watch: 4:43 PM. Two hours since O'Hare had grounded all planes. Sighing, he pulled the paperback *Zero Times Infinity* from his backpack and opened it to the receipt he'd inserted.

Halfway into reading the marked page, his eyes strayed again to the scarf-draped woman. This time her eyes widened, her mouth opened, and she rose from her seat. *Now I've done it.*

He spoke first. "Forgive my rudeness, I didn't mean to stare."

She shook her head, chocolate-sundae earrings bobbing. "I'm the one who was staring, trying to remember where I saw your picture. You're a missionary, aren't you?"

"Y-yes."

"Xavier Sand, that's it. You work in Japan, like your namesake centuries ago."

"Right, but—" Xavier cast a nervous glance at her husband, who seemed preoccupied with brushing off his long indigo robes, not paying the straying wife any attention.

"I'm Odette Peterson."

"Peterson?" Xavier stared at her, puzzled. *Is she clinging to her maiden name as the only remnant of her former life?*

"I know, you've never heard of me. Nobody has. I've just finished my first term and now have to raise

an even bigger budget. I envy you well-known veterans.”

“Wait.” A ray of comprehension broke through his foggy confusion. “You’re a missionary, too?” *And landed a husband your first term?*

Xavier could hardly disapprove, having fallen in love with a Japanese national and done everything in his power to convince her to marry him. *But I was already familiar with the culture, or thought I was. Does she have any idea what she’s gotten into?*

She nodded and motioned her husband forward. “Pastor Isa, I’d like you to meet a fellow missionary, Xavier Sand. Xavier, this is Pastor Isa Abakkada, one of the first graduates of Sahara Crossroads Bible School.”

Pastor Isa smiled, showing crooked teeth, and clenched Xavier’s hand. “Good afternoon. I...what-you-say...lighted to meet you.”

“Likewise. Is this your first trip to America?”

“Amereek, yes, blessed country.” Pastor Isa swept his robe-draped arm toward the drenched tarmac. “Very much water and grass and trees.”

Xavier could see where black threads repaired tears in the pastor’s robe. His right hand sported a bulky silver ring, but nothing else hinted at any wealth. *Poor girl. How can she adapt to such poverty? Or is her missionary income what attracted him?*

“...San Francisco?”

Xavier realized his mind had strayed. “I’m sorry, would you repeat the question.”

Pastor Isa turned to Odette and spoke in French. Odette interpreted, “Pastor Isa wants to know if you’ll be speaking at the big mission convention in San Francisco.”

“I’m afraid not. I wasn’t invited. My itinerary

takes me into the valley—Lodi, Modesto, Sacramento.”

Pastor Isa smiled again. “I pray God for you. You pray for me. He bless us both.”

His infectious camaraderie made Xavier feel ashamed of his competitive thoughts. “Thank you. I will.”

“And we pray much-much for Mademoiselle Odette. She needs miracle.”

Mademoiselle? Xavier cast a questioning look at Odette, whose dimples hinted at a secret joke.

1

Odette could guess what Xavier was thinking. Due to her Tuareg garb, people assumed she was married to Pastor Isa. She hastened to clue him in. "As a favor to the national church, I'm assisting the pastor until he arrives safely in the hands of the conference host. Then I'll continue my journey home."

Xavier's forest-green eyes widened but didn't waver. "And where might that be?"

Unnerved by his intense gaze, she looked down at her sandals. "Davis, not far from the campus. My dad's a physics professor."

"I leave you peace." Pastor Isa withdrew.

Xavier continued, "You mean you're just now arriving home? Your parents haven't seen you for four years? What an awful time for your flight to be delayed."

"Actually, it's only been three years. We had a week together after language school."

"Did they cry and cling and beg you not to go overseas?"

She raised her gaze to his, to make sure he was teasing, and noticed a lock of chestnut hair falling over his forehead. *Handsome than his photo.* "No, they were quite happy to be rid of me—the last baby bird to leave the nest."

"I'll bet." He glanced at his backpack.

She took that as her cue to escape his disquieting presence. "I'll let you get back to your book."

"No, it'll wait. Do you suppose Pastor Isa would watch our belongings while we stole off for a cup of coffee?"

Lightning flashed as she hesitated. *Careful. Remember, a man's attentions nearly derailed your last itineration.*

"We've plenty of time, I assure you." A rumble of thunder accompanied his voice.

One cup can't hurt. "Sure, I'll ask." She returned to Pastor Isa, explained the situation, and motioned Xavier to come.

With a boyish smile, Xavier brought his backpack and thanked Pastor Isa. Then he took her arm and piloted her toward the coffee shop. "So, where are you stationed—Kuwait? Egypt? I'm not familiar with Middle-Eastern missions."

"Mali, West Africa—south of Timbuktu."

"And your earrings are made of camel bone?"

Odette marveled at how much male attention her hand-crafted baubles attracted. To show them to best advantage she lowered her scarf onto her shoulders and shook her head. "Nope."

"Ivory and ebony?"

"Glass. Bead making is my hobby."

He stopped behind a businessman at the counter. "Really? What do the local artisans think? Doesn't that interfere with their commerce?"

"I don't sell them in the marketplace. I give them away as prizes to ladies who come to my Bible study."

"Clever." Xavier moved forward. "What will you have...mocha...latté... cappuccino...fermented ox blood?"

Continents Apart

“Yuck, you’re thinking of animists on the other side of the continent. People in my region are Muslim. I’ll have the mocha.”

He ordered two. “They don’t drink blood?”

“Nor alcohol. Not if they obey the Koran.”

“So, if you’re evangelizing the Muslims, how do you approach the men?”

“I don’t. I conduct classes for women—nutrition, sanitation, maternity—plus a Bible study in my home.”

“You’re a nurse?”

“Uh-huh.”

He paid for their coffee, handed her hers, and scanned the crowded room.

She followed him to a corner, no chairs or tables vacant. “What about you?”

He winked. “I thought you read all about me. Or did you just stare at the photo?”

“I...” She could feel herself blushing. “I want to hear it from you.”

“Of course, forgive me for teasing. I develop websites and media productions for churches, Bible colleges, and Christian schools. With high tech and big bucks I try to do what your glass beads do—entice people to explore God’s word.”

She took a careful sip. “You’ve picked a challenging field.”

“Computer graphics and animation? It’s been my passion since childhood.”

“I mean Japan—the people are so high tech and forward thinking—what can America or any other nation impress them with?”

Xavier chuckled. “You’re right, but only one percent of the population has any clue the Creator exists. My job is to use their media to present His

message.”

“Sounds like you love your work.”

He pointed. “Better grab that chair before—”

She did, a second person left, and he grabbed the chair opposite. They sighed simultaneously and laughed into each other’s eyes. A fresh gust of wind hit the window like a burst of applause. Odette felt dangerously alone with him in spite of the crowd.

Seeking relief, she glanced out the window for some sign the storm would soon let up and Xavier would be seated on the plane—rows away. Instead, her weary eyes imagined X’s and O’s in the pattern of droplets on the window pane, as if fate were playing a game of tic-tac-toe to capture her heart.

She rubbed her eyes. *No, Lord, this isn’t happening.*

“Anything wrong?” he asked.

“Exhaustion. I didn’t get any sleep on the plane or in the Paris airport.” *I’ll be back to normal after a night in my canopy bed.*

She refocused on Xavier to reassure herself how ordinary he was—like dozens of other men who embarked and disembarked and crowded the terminals.

He leaned forward. “Even with mussed hair and sleepy eyes, you look...”

She shook her head in denial.

“...unforgettable. Would you give me your phone number?”

“No.”

“Email address?”

“No.”

His well-modulated voice, soft and personal, drew her in, like her favorite Sacramento DJ. “Why not?”

She continued shaking her head, not wanting to

explain.

He grinned. "Give me one good reason or I'll get it from mission headquarters."

No man had ever been this persistent. Her traitorous heart let loose a smile. "Me at Odette Peterson dot net."

He scribbled it on a corner of his napkin and tore it off. Opening his wallet, he stuffed the note inside, withdrew a business card, and handed it to her. Against a grey-green background of bamboo leaves, a haiku read:

*He shaped man from dust,
Breathed and Adam came alive,
Where are you, O Man?*

"Oh, that's precious—" Announcements interrupted over the loudspeaker. She jumped up, card in hand and coffee forgotten. "I've got to get back and explain to Pastor what's happening. Bye."

"But it's not his flight," Xavier called after her.

"I know, but the garbled sound—he won't understand."

The seat-belt tone sounded and the green light came on. Odette started to get up but saw Xavier striding her way, his eyes trained on her. In spite of her resolution to feign coolness and put distance between them, her heart thrilled at the sight of him—his obvious eagerness to speak to her—and her face muscles wouldn't obey.

"How would you like to join me on row 28?"

Tanya—" He indicated the middle-aged lady behind him. "Has agreed to switch seats."

Odette looked at her apologetically. "Sorry—"

Tanya cut her off with a smile. "Anything to oblige old friends."

"Thank you. I'll switch back before landing."

"Nah, don't worry about it, honey. I'm in no rush. It's only my husband waiting, and we've been married twenty years."

Odette laughed, followed Xavier and marveled at his audacity. Once she was seated on the aisle, she leaned close and whispered, "Old friends? What did you tell her?"

"That we hadn't seen each other since School of Missions four years ago."

"But that's a—"

"Nope. You were among the new missionaries being commissioned, right? So I must have seen you."

"Tsk, ts. Such manipulation of the truth. Besides, I didn't see *you* there."

"Didn't you? Isn't that where you spotted my photo?"

The truth flashed like a bolt of lightning from the storm now passed. *I've held the memory since reading his bio four years ago, and he knows it. No wonder he's so presuming.* She tried to get a grip on her tired mind and out-of-kilter emotions.

He winked. "Funny what the memory retains, isn't it? Maybe God had something to do with it."

She shook her head. "Hardly. He's called me to Mali, you to Japan."

"Ah, but one of us could transfer."

Indignation shot forth like hot lava. "And, naturally, that would be the female's role."

His eyes stopped tracking her earrings and fixed on her eyes. "I didn't say that."

No, but you were thinking it. She remembered all the times she'd yielded to her brothers, her father, any male in her life that mattered.

If any one love brother or sister, mother or father, more than Me... She crossed her arms and steeled her will to please the Lord no matter what.

Xavier's face clouded. "I see I've offended you. Please forgive me. I didn't mean to."

"Nothing to forgive. It's me, not you. I've been a pushover most of my life."

He arched an eyebrow. "You haven't even lived a third of it yet, so 'most' is hardly accurate."

She laughed. "Right. So for the rest of my life, I'll be resolute and uncompromising."

"A little compromise of non-essentials is all right, don't you think? Especially to keep peace between long-lost friends."

That fast he'd disarmed her. No, she couldn't hold out against her brothers' charm very long—or this man's.

The sooner I get off this plane, the better.

2

Odette awoke under the ruffled canopy of childhood, pink anemones and cherry blossoms showering her bed. She stretched and yawned and shielded her eyes against the sunlight that dodged the swaying curtains. *Mom must have opened a window—what time is it, anyway?*

Sounds of a chair scraping, a skillet hitting the sink, and the dishwasher laboring confirmed the lateness of the hour. She pushed back the covers and jumped out of bed. Her bare toes recognized the soft undulations of the braided-rag rug. *Home.*

A light tap on the door. “Odette, are you up? Your omelet’s ready.”

“Be there in a second, Mom.” She donned her robe, combed the fright out of her hair, gargled to refresh her mouth, padded into the kitchen, and sat down in front of the lone plate. The steaming mushroom-and-onion omelet looked and smelled the same, but in the place of French baguette ovals, square toast. In the place of sweetened condensed milk, powdered creamer. She thanked God for the California morning and dug in.

“Eat up. Your dad’s getting the RV ready for our trip.”

Odette choked. “Trip? I can’t go anywhere, I have phone calls to make, services to book, pastors to see.”

"But this is your vacation."

"Technically yes, but if I don't book at least three months of speaking engagements in advance, I'll be scrambling all year and never catch up."

"Honey, you just got home. Surely you can take a couple of days to relax. You'll love it—swimming, boating, and fishing on Lake Sonoma."

Odette looked at her mother in despair, feeling trapped. A trip to Lake Sonoma meant stopping on the way to see Aunt Emma—who might not live another four years to see Odette's next furlough. How could she say no?

Her mother poured fresh-brewed coffee into Odette's mug. "Take along your cell phone and make calls at the lake, if you must."

"Uh-uh. Mixing business and pleasure never works. If I'm going to lose a couple of days, I might as well enjoy them. But come Wednesday I need to be back here, understood?"

Her dad stepped in, wrench in hand and a spot of grease on his bald head. "What's this about Wednesday?"

"I need to be back here Wednesday night, so I can start phoning Thursday morning."

"Your mother and I counted on spending the entire week."

"Then leave me here. I can't afford to lose that much time."

He studied her as he set the wrench down and took off his gloves. "You've changed."

She sprang to his side and gave him a hug. "No, Daddy. Just grown up a bit. Gained responsibilities. Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Mm." He pulled away and looked her straight in