

ONE-*with*-ONE KINDA AL-FARIS

and Mai Al-Nakib, author of
The Hidden Light of Objects

Writing this interview is poignant for me, and I'm thinking, where does one begin when it comes to Mai, for our paths have converged in many instances for she and I share more than this article together. We share precious memories of a time gone past that few have had the pleasure to experience, memories of a different Kuwait than to the one we live in now, of a Kuwait we both remember fondly.

Mai and I attended high school together. We shared the same Kuwait; sat in the same classrooms, shared many of the same friends and have a unique bond through these joint experiences. Sitting down with her these many years later to discuss her book *The Hidden Light of Objects* was a uniquely surreal experience in many ways. For one, the subject matter of the book itself makes reference to these shared memories, so is it happenstance relevancy to this interview or Mai's book achieving what it is set out to do, to invoke our own memories.

The Hidden Light of Things is a collection of stories that are loosely connected. "Each story was initially written as a standalone" but by about the third or fourth story, Mai noticed certain recurring words, images and characters being revisited. These stories eventually became connected, even more so after inserting first person narration vignettes at the beginning of each story, narrated by the same first person set in the same time.

Mainly set in the Middle East; Kuwait, Lebanon Palestine but even as far as US, Greece and Japan, all of these various short stories however are connected to the Middle East. The intention was to explore how objects that people own or encounter which can retain a sort of 'life' and which trigger memories, of certain times gone past, or feelings relating to this object in times past. Her research into memory, because it's a interest of hers, the idea of remembering, memory how does it turn us into who, and what we are is what led her to writing the short stories which led to the culmination of this book.





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Mai a graduate of Brown University, is an Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Kuwait University, and has always been obsessed with writing, filling diaries upon diaries since her days in Elementary school. However, after teaching and doing academic writing for a while, she felt it was time to turn her attention to Fiction, and began with the short stories thinking that they would be a good way to ease into writing a novel. She came to find that short stories take just as much effort " a condensed and difficult form" as would a full novel, and is now well prepared to write her second. She started in 2006 and stopped, then concentrated on finishing the task during a year's sabbatical from the University. Once the final draft was finished in 2012, she sent it to Bloomsbury UK's branch in Qatar, which is currently sponsored with the Qatar Foundation as the Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, who after receiving their go ahead from their UK headquarters, offered her a publishing contract, and consequently produced the book.

The rest is what makes history, putting Kuwaiti authors on the map, encouraging each and every one of us to simply follow their heart. Mai has done just that, yet the implication of her success is a much grander feat than just telling her stories. Her success is a valuable gift to our society, and will add to the richness of the culture we are building.

Mai held her first book launch and reading at CAP Gallery to a full house of attendees, to great acclaim by both her peers and strangers. *The Hidden Light of Things* can be purchased on Amazon.com. She is based in Kuwait and is currently working on her second novel.

