

The Mystery of the Golden Charm
By Geeta Gokhalay (JBCN Oshiwara. Mumbai. Class -7 Ena)

It was an unusually pale and gloomy day in Mumbai's busy suburb, Oshiwara. The wind grew stronger and the clouds became darker... CRASH! The thunder roared like a lion. It started to rain and everyone was in a hurry, opening umbrellas and running to nearby shops or bus stations. The shopkeepers packed up their stalls on the streets and took their stuff away to shaded areas. Those without umbrellas were soaking wet. Alex Hope was one of them.

Alex was a tall, fourteen-year-old girl with gorgeous golden brown hair and fair skin. Alex had an extraordinary secret, which she was very protective about. Ideally, she was supposed to embrace this secret: That she was a half-unicorn and had a tiny horn and two unicorn ears which she kept covered under her hair and her jacket hoodie.

That evening, Alex was returning home badly beaten and bruised. She felt very weak but her courage was intact. She half-walked and half-ran for shelter. The rain got heavier and the drops falling rapidly on her uniform felt like a thousand bees stinging her skin.

When Alex finally saw the primroses before her house, she was at ease. She walked through the gate and rang the doorbell. Her mother, Elvira Hope, opened the door and was shocked to see Alex soaked to the skin, with blood and bruises on her face. Elvira was in her early 40s and had the same facial features as Alex. She had some cookies in her hand but upon seeing Alex, the tray dropped from her hand, "Alex!!!" she shrieked, "What happened to your face? Who did this to you?" Oh, it's nothing, Mom," Alex said as she tried to hide the scars and bruises on her face as she rushed to her bedroom.

Elvira was worried and hoped Alex would recover soon. It would be challenging to find a good, but affordable, doctor. Ever since her husband Tom had died in a road accident in Macau, the family's financial situation had been tight. Elvira, an Indian, had met Tom, an American, at University and settled in the US after they got married. She had been a homemaker since the birth of her kids. Life in the US was expensive and after Tom's death, their beautiful mansion in Connecticut had to be rented out. Elvira and her daughters, Alex and Vicky, had said a final goodbye to America. and moved to India barely a month earlier to rebuild their lives. Elvira had been born and raised in India and felt comfortable in this warm and hospitable country - at least that's what she had thought - until now.

The Hopes now lived in a small section of a bungalow in Oshiwara.. The only nice thing about their house was the small but nurturing primrose garden with delightfully fragrant pink and red roses. Their lousy neighbours, the Shastris, didn't like the Hopes that much. Alex and Vicky would usually get screamed at by Ms. Shastri when they were playing tennis and the ball flew all the way into Ms. Shastri's house. The other time when the family was celebrating the 4th of July, they only burst ground fire crackers but even then, Ms. Lalika and her bratty daughter Reneya, would blackmail them saying they'd complain to the local police. They threatened to complain about the noise and that they should ban 'those' Americans.

Alex, an eighth grader, was having a rough time at school. She was good at her studies - especially English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry and Humanities - but Hindi was tough! Alex felt isolated as she was a foreigner and couldn't speak a word of Hindi. Then, the bullying and blackmailing by Reneya, who went to the same school. Her classmates picked on her and called her a goth-freak, a doll, an outdater and hooded creep. Reneya was the

leader of the gang - smart and spiteful, Nivi a quick brained girl in class, great at sports but full of negativity for Alex and finally, there was Siddhi, a spoilt rich girl, with a sharp-tongue.

Alex's sister Vicky, was her only friend. Vicky loved and cared for Alex a lot. Vicky had brown hair tied into two pigtails even for a 10th grader but Alex never minded - neither did Vicky herself. But the problem was that they could never meet since Alex was in Grade 8 and Vicky was in Grade 10. Sadly, Vicky was never there to stand up for the meek and timid Alex. Vicky just had too many studies and had to stay back longer in school for extra classes..

The day after she was beaten up, Alex went to school, thinking everything would be fine - but more trouble awaited her. She saw three scowling faces: Nivi, Reneya and Siddhi. "Look at Alex, the depressed soul!" called out Reneya. "I know! She calls herself an Indian-American but can't even speak a single word of Hindi!" Nivi scorned. "And why does she even wear a hood to school? It looks so awful on her!" Siddhi ranted. Alex didn't say a word.

After school ended, Alex saw Reneya, Siddhi and Nivi walking towards her in the most suspicious manner ever. "Hey Alex, we wanted to tell you this. Just leave this country since your stupid American family is taking over the whole place!" the trio said. Nivi snatched Alex's bag off her back and gave it to Reneya while Nivi held Alex's hands tightly so she couldn't get her belongings. "Let's see. Your A+ in Mathematics and English test... How stupid!" Reneya giggled. She crumpled the paper and threw it on the floor. "What else? Aha! A letter from your father in your drawing book!" Reneya said. She took the book and slammed it on the floor. "Aaand... A CHARM FROM YOUR DUMB SISTER VICKY!" Reneya screamed and laughed in a maniacal way. She threw the charm on the floor and then they all started kicking Alex and pulled off her hood.

Everyone saw Alex's long hair and a little pink horn sprouting out of her forehead along with two unicorn ears. The others started laughing and then Reneya finished it off by punching her straight. After the drama was over, Alex got up and picked up the last letter from her father, while he was in the hospital during his last days following the accident.

Dear Alex,

I just want you to know that you'll always be my special girl. I loved your grades in maths, the stories you wrote and the paintings you painted. I wish I could be here longer to see you grow up but the time has come for me to say goodbye. But remember, I'll always watch over you and you'll be an amazing woman when you grow up. I hope to see you bold and happy.

Love, Daddy (Tom Hope)

Alex cried hard, wishing her father was alive to see how amazing she was. "Oh dad, I wish you were here. I don't have any friends other than mom and Vicky. It would have been so much better with you!" Alex said, crying desperately, wanting nothing more than just a companion at school.

Alex was very close to her father as he was a unicorn like her and she inherited it from him. After his death, Elvira told Alex to keep this a secret because in the place she lived, everyone hated unicorns and would kidnap one if they saw it roaming about in public.

When Alex got back from school her mom was worried. "Alex, seriously, what happened? You know I'm your mom and you can tell me anything," Elvira said. "It's nothing, mom. I'm just tired." Alex said trying to hide and cover the truth. "No. It seems like you're not alright! Please tell me the truth." Elvira said, begging to know more.

"Well, you see, mom, I'm friendless! My classmates bully me. They beat me up and threw my things today," Alex started to sob thinking about the fear, frustration and darkness' reign. "Oh, my goodness! Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Elvira asked. "I didn't want to worry you, mom. I know things have been hard for you since Daddy died," Alex confessed.

"Oh my goodness! Show me what they did to you, Alex!" said Elvira. Alex showed her mom the crumpled letter, smashed notebook, English and Maths test papers and the golden charm that Vicky had given Alex. "I- I'm so sorry!" Elvira said. "I've been a bad bad mom not paying more attention to you!" Elvira cried. "Oh mom, it's nothing like that. I've been a bad child since I didn't tell the truth," Alex said. The two cried their evening away, flooding their thoughts with tears of sorrow.

The next day at school, Alex was different and even more vicious than ever. She had seen better days and this was the last straw. She didn't wear her hood and had her long flowing hair swaying in the cool wind. Sprouting from her forehead was a purple horn with two pointy ears on the side. She had had enough of having to face the bullies and cry over it.

Alex was walking towards the exit to leave for home and everyone was staring at her. Some even sniggered. Just then, a familiar voice screamed out, "Hey Alex! What are you? Ugly?! Hahahhahah!" It was Reneya. As usual, Nivi and Siddhi were with her. Alex charged towards the three laughing girls and when Reneya was about to punch her, Alex held her hand with great force. She pulled Reneya and threw her down onto the floor. Nivi tried tackling her as she was one of the strongest, but to her surprise, Nivi too got thrown on the floor, breathless. Siddhi was left, but she couldn't defend herself since Alex was already so strong. She pushed Siddhi to the floor too! Alex left in a huff after her work was done.

On the way, it started to rain again. Alex had worn the golden charm and suddenly she realised it flew off her neck. "What's happening?" Alex wondered. She ran after the charm and fell with a thud on the wet and smeary tar. "Great, this is just great! Now my clothes are ruined," Alex said miserably. She then saw a golden luster in the distance. She dashed towards it like a bullet train and saw the golden heart charm in front of her. She touched it and suddenly vanished into the charm. When Alex woke up, she found herself in a room with glowing lanterns, each with a different memory enscripted.

"Hello, Alex. It's me, Elvira. I finally found out what happened after you told me that night. You may not know this but now is the right time to tell you. I am the ruler of Royale High - one of the best magic schools in the world. You will no longer be alone. They are giving me the position of School Vice Head there. It's time for you to take the decision in your hands. Do you want to leave this world of humans and stay with me in the Magical Land? Choose wisely." Elvira said. "Mom, I- I don't know what will happen but I will join you. I want to make new friends and the fate of three enemies was my power of strength." Alex said.

"Alex, everyone has a special quality in them. They just have to believe in it," Elvira replied. Alex saw her first painting, her A+s and her soon-to-be-published book. After the great epiphany, Elvira and Alex got out of the charm and walked home together. "Alex,

listen, you'll always be my special girl. You have seized your power and moment today. Now you just need to control it. I'm taking you there for this reason," Elvira explained. "Yes mom, I understand." Alex nodded in agreement.

The next day, Elvira, Alex and Vicky stepped into the carriage for Royale High. When they reached there, Alex saw a group of girls all looking different and felt scared. "Go on, Alex. Now is your chance - and moment to be the best you can be," Elvira said encouragingly and left. Alex went off to meet the girls. She felt shy but managed to introduce herself with a smile. "Hello, I'm Alex. I have the strength of a unicorn which was shown to my enemies." Alex said shyly.

"Oh why hello there, Alex. I'm Dove. I'm an angel and daughter of Debra Rivers. Your unicorn horn looks quite cool." Dove said with a warm smile. Dove had pink hair which was left loose and at the top were two small buns. She wore a long white dress and black shoes. She also had a sparkling golden Halo on top of her head signifying her angelic side.

Another young girl introduced herself, "Hey, I'm Ariel. I'm the mermaid daughter of Iris - The II." Ariel had short strawberry blonde hair with turquoise and mint streaks. She wore a mint sweater dress with blue flip flops. She had small scaled cheeks and finned hands. She could transform into a mermaid when she touched the water. That's why swimming was her favorite class in school. Plus, they were both Americans! It was such a joy to Alex to find someone of her own kind.

"And I'm Janet, daughter of Maurissa the Great," said another young girl. She had pointed fairy ears and wings and wore a maroon tank top and a black skirt. She had shiny jet black hair and glowing orange eyes.

It was such a pleasure to meet the girls. Alex soon discovered that each girl had her own strengths - and weaknesses - which they nurtured with great pride. For instance, Dove could be sharp-tongued and a bit nerdy but she was loyal and respectful to her friends. Her friendly voice was angelic and melodic. She also was very proficient in singing besides academics. Ariel was very good at Biology and loved swimming as she was a mermaid. She could swim beautifully, gliding in the water and doing lovely dives and could do three turns in mid-air and land in the water. She was even good at gymnastics with her lovely aerial flips and backrolls. Alex and she had the same past background from being bullied in their previous country and schools. Janet was very good at studies and also athletics, tennis and lacrosse. She was the fastest runner in class and a swift lacrosse and tennis player. Even though she was a little sort of nerd, she was still a kind and respectful girl.

Alex made a lot of other friends too within the next few days; Aliya was poor at her studies but she was a natural actress with a lovely accent and went to acting class and was the star student there. Ginny was very good at academics and could paint, draw and play the violin very well. Vicky had made friends too: Dove's sister Daniela and Janet's sister Jane.

The girls all discovered the waterfall swimming pool with a bakery on top of it. They learnt how to bake and discovered the enchanted gardens with fresh and delightfully smelling flowers - especially Alex's favourite: primroses! They reminded her of the primrose garden in her small house. The bakery and treats that she learned how to bake, tasted just like her hometown's Santa Princesa Bakery. The swimming pool reminded her of the lake she used to swim in the back of the small rows of houses. The four friends always stayed close,

especially Dove and Alex. Dove and Alex both shared the same sense of humor and love for writing, drawing and playing the guitar.

There was only one problem - Alissa! Alissa was a mean and spoiled girl from a rich family, the daughter of a businessman and fashion model. She always wore the latest trends and picked on the other students in class and had her little pack with her own spoiled friends. Their names were Dolly, Rabia and Hilda. They were all from the same background and used to pick on Alex and her gang of friends.

One day, Alex and Dove were chatting and joking around about their boring Physics class when Alissa and her other friends Dolly, Rabia and Hilda walked up to them and said, "Hey Dove, we need to talk to you. And Alex!! Don't try and poke your little nose or shall I say horn!" hissed Alissa. "Whatever," Alex replied coolly. Dove came back after a while and continued chatting with Alex.

Over the next few days, Alex noticed Dove had a worried expression on her face. At lunch, when the girl gang was sitting in the cafeteria, Alex asked, "Dove why are you so worried? You look unwell. Is everything alright?" Alex asked worryingly.

"Everything is fine, you nosey unicorn! You are always my tail and annoy me," Dove bellowed. "But you're my friend," Alex said, shocked at Dove's unexpectedly rude behavior. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go sit with Alissa and the others," Dove said and walked away. "Fine, I don't need anyone to be with me. I learnt that the hard way!" Alex retorted back.

After class, Alex ran back to her room, visibly upset. "Alex, are you fine?" Janet asked. "What's going on?" Ariel asked as she walked into the room. "Why does everyone need to know and make it such a big issue?!" Alex sneered.

"Alex, you say you're fine but you're not. Besides, I know why you are sad. Dove betrayed you and she was your best friend," Janet said. "Yes, that's true," Alex agreed. Alex came out from the pillows and sat up. "Alex, Dove may betray you but we don't hate you at all. Just remember you are not alone and you have Janet, Me, Ginny and Aliya." Ariel said in a calm and reassuring voice.

Ariel, Janet and Alex went for a swim. It was summer in Magical Land and the pool looked exceptionally clear and blue today as the bright sun was shining all across Magical Land. Splash! Splash! The three girls dived into the pools jumping and getting out of the water and pushing each other back in. After the swim, Janet took Ariel and Alex to the school's official spa. They got all cleaned taking a nice mud bath and then a normal but relaxing shower. Alex forgot to take off her face mask when stepping into the shower and Janet had mud all over her! It was all pleasure and fun.

For the next few weeks, Alex spent most of her time with Janet, Ariel, Aliya and Ginny. They had great fun. One day, Alex returned to her room and found a note on the table.

Hey Alex,

I just wanted to say I'm very sorry for all I've done and you're the only friend who's really worthy to me and I really mean it. I had to listen to Alissa and the

other mean girls because they beat up anyone who doesn't listen to them. I didn't want that to happen to me and that was selfish. I'm very sorry indeed and also I really want to be your best friend again. I also want the others to trust me again and I really mean it. I am grateful to have such amazing friends like you. I really am angry with myself for what I did and I really want to be your best friend again. Please give me another chance.

Yours sincerely,

Dove♥☐☺☐

After reading the note, Alex thought a lot and decided to forgive Dove. She couldn't find Dove anywhere so she decided to write back.

Hi Dove,

I got your letter and thought about it. Yes, we can turn over a new leaf and start a new chapter and once again become best friends. I understand what you are going through with the bullies and I've faced similar situations like this too. If they try and speak to you this way again, please come and tell me and don't listen to them as they deserve nothing and we deserve better. I will tell the others that you apologized for what you've done and yes, I promise the others will forgive you. I will persuade them to forgive you and regain faith in you. Do not worry!

*Signed,
Alex*

The next day, when the two girls met each other in class, Dove started sobbing and Alex comforted her. "It's okay, Dove. We'll tell Ms. Greene, the headmistress and she'll deal with the bullies. I've told the others about your regret and apology and they have forgiven you, so do not worry," Alex said warmly. After the emotional reunion Dove, Alex, Ariel, Janet, Aliya and Ginny all went to Ms. Greene's office. Ginny knocked on the door. "Come in!" said a confident and clear voice of Ms. Greene and all the girls entered. "So, what brings you girls here?" Ms. Greene asked inquisitively.

"Alissa, Hilda, Dolly and Rabia have been bullying Alex and Dove and also other students by menacing and beating up others, threatening Dove, and making her turn against Alex," Ariel narrated. "Yes, Dove has been rude to me but it was forced and staged. She realized her mistake and owned up for it soon enough" Alex added.

"Well girls, I'm certainly proud of you all for standing up to bullying and lending a hand. I will have a serious talk with the four girls Rabia, Alissa, Dolly and Hilda. You all are free to leave." Ms. Greene said calmly. The four girls were pulled up by Ms Greene and assigned cleaning punishments for a month. They were made to clean the yards after school for one hour every day. From that day onwards, nobody ever bullied Alex and her friends ever again.

"Fate can be tragic but the impact and change always inscripts an epiphany and a revolution in your life."- Geeta Gokhalay.