

## No Ordinary Friendship

By: Liyaana J.

My name is Samirah. I'm an average teenage girl. I use Snapchat, I love Starbucks, I watch the Flash. However, to most people, I'm an alien. It's because I'm Muslim. When I was nine, everyone in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade would be like, "What's the thing on your head?" or "Why do you wear that?" or "Does your dad make you wear that?" I would always answer politely and calmly, "It's hijab. I wear it for protection and it's my choice." I must have repeated those words thousands of times! To be honest, it got kind of irritating.

But then Middle School came. Middle School with a capital M. I was the only girl who wore hijab, the only girl who was Muslim, the only girl who was considered "different". As a month of Middle School passed, I had made no progress in fitting in. I'd received curious stares, rude sneers, and cruel comments. Those comments felt as sharp as a knife. The worst one though, was from a tall eight grader with a tongue as prickly as a grater. "*Go back to your country, freak!*" It didn't make sense, because I'd been born in Texas, but it still hurt.

Another month passed, and a new girl arrived. Alicia. Alicia Parks. She was tall and slim and wore skinny jeans and a *Flash* shirt. And her hair-it was pure white. Her eyelashes were long and thick and-white. Her face was very pale. I heard whispers being exchanged in the classroom. "*New girl... white... albino.*" Oh! Alicia was albino! I looked at her again, and then pinched myself. "STOP staring!" I muttered to myself. I was curious about her - was that bad? The poor girl looked as if she wanted to cry - and it reminded me of myself on the first day of school. So, I got up and sat next to her.

"Hi." "*Um... hi.*" "I'm Samirah." "*Oh-I'm Alicia.*" "So... you're new here?" "*Yep. I'm from Wisconsin.*" "Oh! So, should I call you Cheesehead?" "*Excuse me?*" "Aren't people from Wisconsin called Cheeseheads?" "*No... only the ones who like cheese!*" Now, we were both laughing. At that moment, we had become best friends. I didn't care that she was different, and she didn't either. We both looked past our differences and saw a friend in each other. We stuck together like peanut butter and jelly. Any mean comment targeted towards us got deflected. We were two different people with similar personalities. Alicia is a normal teenager just like me. She uses Snapchat, she loves Starbucks, she watches the Flash. But she looks different. And that's what I love about her.