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Harreċat: A Novella and Reflective Essay

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Harreġat: *A Novella*

By Quanita Ajouhaar

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1961

On the 9th of August 1961, an especially cold, rainy day, the five girls were standing outside of their mother, Rhoda's, bedroom door, waiting patiently for their first brother to arrive, since Rhoda's belly was unusually large this time around. It looked different from the way it did the five times before. The girls sat against the door in the hallway that was filled with rakams that their mother recently got as a gift from their neighbour. They all thought that it was a miracle to finally have a brother. It had to have been a blessing from Allah, a Makkah baby. "Aaaah," they heard Rhoda scream from the other side of the door, where the mid-wife stood in front of her open legs repeatedly saying, "Merrem is amper daar." It was Rhoda's sixth baby. She thought it would come out easily. "Dit is darem my sesde kind. Ek poep hom sommer uit," she would say every time one of them spoke about her birth. And she eventually did, "poep the baby out," and a healthy cry reached the hallway piercing the ears of the girls. They beamed smiles, pushing against the door to come in. Luckily, it was still locked. When the midwife pulled the child out, and Rhoda's husband, Boebie, got the first peek of the baby, he smiled. The midwife placed the child on Rhoda's chest. "Waar's sy tollie?" she asked the midwife. "Dis 'n nog 'n meisie," the mid-wife responded nervously. Rhoda burst into hysterical laughter, forgetting about the excruciating pain that she had just been enthusiastic to go through. Boebie unlocked the door and the five girls fell through the doorway. Then they clustered around their mother and their new sibling, who did not stop crying for the entire ten minutes since leaving Rhoda's womb. The girls pressed their palms to their ears, sheltering them from the newborn's piercing scream. They were disappointed to see that they had another sister. Boebie scanned the room, watching, as his entourage of little women gathered around their mother and their new sister. "Ghafsa," he said. "Ghafsa means 'gathering.' Jou suster se naam sal Ghafsa wees."

2001

I don't know anything. One day I was partying my gat off and the next I was sitting alone on the stoep asking Allah what I did wrong. I wasn't the best Muslim growing up, I know. But still man, is it normal for one human to go through so much? I look at my sisters and their whole families that don't even know what being broken means. I miss Dadda. I miss him being harregat. Because somewhere between all of that stubbornness there was always a lot of love shining through to me, somehow lighting me up. Nowadays you hear of mental health but Mammie het altyd gesê, "Moenie so mal speel nie." But I didn't speel mal. Now that I am mal, now that my whole life is mal, I must sit here and try to find my own way to deal with it. I don't want them to think I'm acting mad. So, I will maar sit here and think of a way to come out of this dark hole. It's hard when you sitting alone in a dark hole and the sand is slowly burying you in it. But it's even harder when you must act like you aren't being versmoored by all of the sand falling in your mouth. Allah knows best. This too shall pass.

- Ghafsa

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1969

“Hoekom het jy netjie die huis verkoop nie? Ons kon at least ’n bietjie geld gemaak het,” Rhoda told Boebie as he was eating her famous koolkos. He looked up at her, chewing the piece of meat that he just bit. “Rhoda, ek gaan nie vir jou weer sê nie. As ons wil ons eier mense wees, dan kan ons nie way gee vir die wit man nie. Hulle kan vir my uit die huis trek, ek sallie it vir hulle gee nie,” Boebie responded. “Ja ek weet! Jy’t daai my hele lewe gesê. Maar nou het ons ses dogters. Meisies. Meisies wat hoof nie deur dieselfde goed hoef te gaan wat ons deur gegaan het nie.”

The girls were all busy packing their clothes into boxes and getting ready to move out of their childhood home in Harfield. Rhoda told them weeks before that they would have to move to her late daddy’s house in Athlone. “My dogters,” Boebie said when he walked into the room. “Ek weet ek het altyd vir julle gesê dat julle moet nooit afgee vir die goed wat issie reg nie. Maar jou ma is reg, rather be safe than sorry. Pak op julle goed, môre trek ons uit.”

And so, the family packed up their things, from their fake brass cups to their wooden stools. Rhoda managed to ask her brother to come with his bakkie to help move the things. It was also more hands to help, since her own hands were occupied with constant klappe on Ghafsa’s back, who refused to help her sisters in packing up their things. The daughters were sad to leave their childhood home. Though Ghafsa, couldn’t care less about where they were staying. She was too young to understand why they had to leave.

1981

The concrete stoep that was directly in front of the front door of their house was covered in old pots and pans stacked on and right next to each other. It was 1 o'clock in the morning. The stoep light was off, and the tall streetlamps did not provide much brightness in the little house on the corner of Church Street. The air was humid and Ghafsa's red bob-cut hair was pressed flat against her neck from the sweat that she gathered by dancing through the night at one of the parties that Primroses Rugby Club threw. She used to go every Saturday night with her sisters, but in the past five years, each one of her sisters got married, so she was the last single one left still staying with her parents.

Ghafsa tiptoed onto one step, then another, then, *CLINK!* She reached the stoep and balanced over the pots. Every step she took was onto another pot or pan. The sound of metal clattering reached the entire road, so much that the neighbours all started switching their lights on and coming to their front door to see what all the geraas was about. Ghafsa looked at all the houses that switched their lights on and gave them a vuil kyk as if they could see her face in the dark road. Rhoda came to the front of the doorway, smiling. She used one hand to hold the door open, and the other was holding a plastic sloffie. "Is die die tyd om huis toe te kom?" Ghafsa's mother asked sternly. "No Mammie, hoe moet ek wiet dat dit so laat is? You don't want to go fix my watch mos," Ghafsa responded nonchalantly. "Hou net jou bek!" Rhoda shouted as she used the sloffie to teach Ghafsa a lesson. "Kom net in." When Ghafsa walked through the doorway, Rhoda managed to grab the back of her red bob with one hand and used the other to hit Ghafsa with the sloffie, until eventually one of the straps shot up and flew off.

When Ghafsa eventually got to her room, it was still messy. There were clothes on the floor, on the chair, on the bed, and hanging from the sides of the peeled white cupboard doors. It was the first year that she had her own room. For as long as she could remember, she had shared a bedroom with her five sisters and, up until last year, when the second youngest sister Salwa, got married, she finally had the room all to herself. She made sure to make the most of all the space, though it often got lonely as she was already used to being in a house filled with women. All that went through Ghafsa's mind that night was the sexy cat that she met at the rugby club. Aziz Jabaar. A charming young bad boy who seemed to be just the right amount of Muslim that she needed. The type who greets with, "Salaam," but still goes dancing now and then. He pulled up in a blue BMW 635CSi, she knew this car all too well, since Boebie, her father, had always spoken about it. It was the first time she saw somebody drive it in Cape Town. He definitely stood out. "Salaam, ek is Aziz. But you can vir my Azi roep," he smirked, extending his hand for a shake. Ghafsa started laughing, and her friend Zulfa, hit her shoulder as an indication for her to "act right." "Your English is, different. You speak Afrikaans at home nuh? I'm Ghafsa," she said, trying her best to hide her Afrikaans side from this mysterious guy.

Ghafsa smiled in her room thinking about that moment. She was too caught up in her head thinking about her encounter with her new crush to hear her room door creaking open. Boebie walked in with a black leather belt wrapped around his knuckles and started hitting all the areas of the bed until he could feel Ghafsa. "Aaah! Dadda daai is seur! Hou op, Dadda! Ma- aah! Dadda! Eina!" she shouted with every lash that caught her. Rhoda walked in and finally switched the light on. Boebie turned around to look at Rhoda, then turned back around, this time seeing clearly in which direction Ghafsa was, now aiming accurately with the edge of his belt. Rhoda walked back out, pretending as if she did not see anything.

“Waar was jy?” Boebie asked Ghafsa once he finally caught his breath again. “By die staak Dadda. Ek het vir Mammie gesê ek gaan. Al my vriende by die skool het staak toe gegaan,” Ghafsa said, her dialect doing a 360 from earlier that night when she spoke to Aziz. “Die staak? Watter staak? Jou susters was daar en hulle het nie vir jou daar gesien nie. So moenie nonsens praat saam met my nie! Jou susters staan heel aand in die straat om vir jou a beter lewe te kry dan sit jy in ander mans se karre! Jy gaan nie weer uit nie hoor jy!” Boebie shouted before he walked out of her room.

Ghafsa didn't cry. She wasn't sad or hurt or affected in any way. She was harregat like that. Didn't break for anybody. Besides her stubbornness, she was dik of going to all the strikes. She went with her father her whole life growing up because he always spoke about the importance of standing up to the whities. But it wasn't for her. She didn't feel like it affected her enough to do something about it. And her sisters didn't make it any easier because they were always involved with everything. She shrugged it off, getting into bed, and replaying her night with Aziz.

From the moment that they locked eyes, right until they stood outside. Aziz placed his leather jacket over Ghafsa's shoulders, even though she wasn't cold, she shivered to test the romance of this man – he passed. They spoke all night long, sitting on the bonnet of his BMW. Until he offered to drop her at home, and made sure to open the passenger door for her. When they arrived at her house, he even offered to walk her inside, but Ghafsa embarrassingly refused. She knew that her parents were especially strict when it came to boys. She smiled, picking up her latest Mills & Boon novel that she took out at the library the past Tuesday, feeling satisfied that the fairytales she had been reading about were finally happening in real life.

1982

Today is the day that I finally leave this house and go on to live my life! Dadda is still a bietjie kwaad for me because I said that I don't wanna stay here. He offered to build a separate entrance for me. But imagine I must still stay with them. They will mos make me mal. He can't give me a good reason, every time I ask him why he just says, "Want jy's my dogter." But I know he doesn't trust Aziz. I heard him and Mammie skelling about me marrying Aziz. Just because he has a kwaai car they keep thinking that he's bad news. Must old people always be so technical? Wil van elke klein ding dink. But I told them they can't stop me from getting married. It completes half of my deen. That lekker shut them up. Aziz is a good man. They will eventually see that. So here we are. The day I start my fairytale of romance and passion!

"Is jy nervous?" Salwa, the second youngest sister, asked Ghafsa while she tried perfecting Ghafsa's gold medoura, "Nee, vir wat. I can at least go out of the house without getting gemoer from both Mammie en Dadda. I am gatvol of living with two bad cops now. Laat ek sien," Ghafsa responded and turned to the mirror, tucking loose pieces of the medoura in. Rhoda walked in and smiled. "Ek is my ma se mooiste kind nuh?" Ghafsa fluttered her eyelashes, waiting for her mother's approval. Instead, she was met with a taai klap on her back, "Jy gaan vir die hand mis!" Rhoda said, gesturing to her hand in the air.

The women in the family all stayed at the home in Athlone, in anticipation of the groom coming back from the mosque as a married man. In the kitchen, Ghafsa's sisters were dishing biryani out of a deep stainless-steel pot into flat, white, glass platters. Around the room was the sound of fifty-plus women rushing. Some rushed to set up tables, others rushed to finish preparing the food. When one platter was filled up, one of Ghafsa's other sisters would take it into the lounge and onto the concrete stoep. That was where they lay the blatte out, to accommodate enough space for all the men that were yet to arrive.

Back in Rhoda's bedroom, Ghafsa and Salwa continued touching up her medoura. It was a challenging headpiece to put on. She sukkeled because she didn't have years of experience in knowing precisely where to place each pin. The medoura held a significant amount of importance in the family. It was the same one that Rhoda wore when she came back from Haj, the same one that was wrapped around the pillow that Ghafsa lay on at her doepmal, and now, the medoura that she would leave her family in. Ghafsa felt honoured to wear it. She was the last one of Rhoda's kids to carry the privilege of the gold medoura. Rhoda grabbed the magnet of pins from Salwa's hands and said, "Gee dit net hier, you don't know what you doing, give here." She took the pins and with grace, as if it was an art form that only she could perfect, pinned the doek, swaying it around left and then right, back and then the front, until it was perfect enough for a new family to take Ghafsa in.

Boebie was the first man to return from the mosque. He was not a very sensitive or emotionally inclined person. So, he walked into the room, patted Ghafsa on her shoulder, and said, "Slamat my kind. Nou is jy 'n ander man se probleem." Ghafsa smiled, while her five sisters hurried to the room to versmoor her with hugs. The sound of six young women was heard laughing and sniffing at the same time, uncertain if they were allowed to cry in front of each other without making fun of it. Rhoda eventually pulled each sister away from Ghafsa. She pulled Tasneem, the middle child by her hair, with a force so hard that a ball of her hair actually came out. Tasneem was forced to wear her scarf on her head that entire day, rather than around her neck as she usually did, to hide the bald patch. When Rhoda finally managed to push her daughters away, she hooked her arm into Ghafsa's and whispered in her ear, "Jy kan altyd terug huis toe kom nê," Ghafsa started tearing up again now, while her five sisters, all stood outside of the door frame watching and listening to that once in a lifetime mother-daughter moment that they had all experienced. Rhoda's soft side was finished showing now,

so she snapped at the girls' eavesdropping and said, "Hey! Gaan maak die sitkamer reg vir die mense! Ophou so bis wees!" Ghafsa knew she was never coming back home.

The girls scattered to the rest of the house, directing people to the wooden benches on either side of the table. Ghafsa took Rhoda's arm and walked to the lounge. The eyes from the room, the lounge, the stoep, and even the road, were all on the A-line gold and cream dress that clung to Ghafsa's slender body, as she walked to the lounge to finally take her seat on a black plastic chair, to meet her husband, rather than her boyfriend, for the first time.

Aziz walked in, with a white scarf casually thrown over the red kufiya that was on his head, and his only brother, Manie, walked behind him. The murmurs and chatter of the women quieted down while they all fixed their scarves and touched up their lipsticks. Aziz looked at Ghafsa, his gold tooth peeking through his smile, and Ghafsa stood up. He placed his hands on his shoulders and kissed her forehead. "My vrou," he said, and then he looked at Rhoda, "Ma, ek sal baie goed na u se dogter kyk." Rhoda smiled and embraced Aziz for a hug. Manie walked towards Ghafsa and hugged her, "Slamat my suster. You tell me if he gives you any problems. Our parents aren't alive now to see him get married but ek is mos his boeta. If he gives you problems you come to me," he winked at her.

The celebrations started, and Ghafsa's five sisters were catering to every guest at the house. Platters of biryani kept coming out followed by jugs of mango and orange juice and tiny glass bottles of an assorted array of Bashews drinks. Tasneem walked around with a white glass kettle offering the guests tea, making her scarf right every five minutes so that her bald patch didn't show, while Rhoda walked to each guest to greet them and thank them for attending. Boebie finally made his way to the newly married couple. Aziz stood up from his chair and

shook Boebie's hand, but Boebie's eyes were on his baby daughter and he let go of Aziz's hand. He bent down just enough to kiss her on the beads that were on the top of her medoura. But he did not cry. He never did.

The time came for the couple to leave and go to their new home. Aziz found a place in Grassy Park, a two-bedroom house with an ensuite bathroom and a little kitchen. Ghafsa stood up, and one of Aziz's aunties walked over to her and placed a cream fur shawl around Ghafsa's shoulders. The guests all started reciting, "Salaam, ya salaam, alaykum salaam," making salawat, while Ghafsa walked through the passageway, crying and greeting her family and listening to the words of comfort that they whispered in her ears when hugging them. She reached the end of the passage and she walked down the stoep, toward the white Merc that she was to drive in to her new home. Before she got into the car, she turned back, looking at the concrete stoep that held so many memories of her tripping over pots and pans, when she came home late. She smiled, almost tasting the freedom she was about to have.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized classical building with columns and a pediment.

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1983

The front of the two-bedroom house on 15 Victoria Road, Grassy Park was always filled with cars. Some of them had one wheel, while others had one door, one window, and so on.

Driving past the house, it was impossible to neglect to notice that at this house, lived a motor mechanic. The cars were protected by a 1.8-meter high vibracrete that was not strong enough to keep the thieves away, though the reputation of Aziz Jabaar was strong enough to stop anybody from entering his property without his consent. The vibracrete was merely an additional extra to make Ghafsa feel safer when she was alone at home.

“Ghafsa! Ek’s honger!” Aziz called out through the narrow passageway when he entered the house, passing the big wedding picture of Ghafsa in her gold medoura and Aziz in his red kufiya that hung in the middle of the passageway wall. Ghafsa, in the kitchen, dropped the stainless-steel sieve on the kitchen tiles, when she heard Aziz’s voice. She bent over to pick the sieve up, but her 35-week-old baby bump made it nearly impossible for her to reach the sieve. Aziz walked in behind her and gently pressed his hands under her chest, lifting her back up from bending over. “Los it. Laat ek.”

The past two years had been a fairytale for Ghafsa. Yes. There were problems, though none were serious enough to actually confront. The biggest issue that arose was the fact that they might have to move back into Rhoda’s house to look after her if Boebie were to die, since none of Ghafsa’s sisters could stay with her, because they all had children, and there was not enough space. Boebie’s heart was getting weaker. Besides that, marriage was everything that she hoped it would be. Before she fell pregnant, she and Aziz spent nights clubbing, then days building his stock cars and racing them at Killarney. Aziz loved the dices. It was nothing short of exhilarating. He was also so good at his job, that one bribe to fix a cop’s motor could

allow him to dominate the N2 highway all the way to Khayelitsha, as the king of street racing.

Ghafsa had the privilege of meeting all of Aziz's friends, and all their wives. She even managed to call a few of the wives her friends, though some of the women made her feel insecure. Aziz always laughed a bit louder with them. But it was nothing. Aziz had been a supportive husband ever since she fell pregnant. He doesn't come home late at night, and when Ghafsa does not have enough energy to go out, he stays indoors with her and rubs her feet. The only challenge he has is cooking, something that he would never do because a man has absolutely no place in the kitchen. Rhoda can attest to that.

Ghafsa sat down on the white bar stool that was beside the island countertop and sighed in relief. "Shukran Aziz. Wat wil jy eet?" she asked him, as she used her right hand to rub the bottom of her belly. "Anything. Maak net vier eiers. Scrambled," Aziz requested. Ghafsa got back up to fetch the eggs and started the process of scrambling them, but she stood up from the chair and felt the inside of her thighs stick together, unsure if she was sweating from just standing up. She looked down, and so did Aziz, but there was nothing unusual on the floor. She turned around, facing the chair and her pupils dilated. "Aziz. Ek dink daai is water. My water broke Aziz," Ghafsa said trying her utmost best to remain calm. Aziz looked at the chair and then looked at Ghafsa, "Kan jy kar toe stap?" he asked, and Ghafsa nodded her head.

Aziz had their new red BMW idling in the driveway when he jumped out of the driver's seat to help Ghafsa into the car. "Eina! Wag Aziz! Ek voel iets," she used her one hand to reach under her vagina and felt something solid. "Jirre fok! Call Aunty Jossy. Die baby kom nou

uit!” For the first time since he got married, Aziz lost control of the situation. It was the first thing that he knew he did not have any experience in or any legs to stand on to make a decision. So, he listened to his wife and ran out of the driveway and over the road to call Aunty Jossy, the midwife who conveniently stayed across the road from them. He banged on the door, calling out to her. “Hai Aziz hoekom moet jy nou so aangaan? My kinders slaap!” she said when she opened the door. “Ghafsa wil jou hê. Sy sê die baba kom Aunty Jossy,” he eventually finished his sentence once he caught his breath. Aunty Jossy, still with her nightgown and her onderkappie on her head ran to Ghafsa in the car and helped her back out. “Kom liefie, laat ons bad toe gaan.”

Aziz sat on his knees next to the bath while Aunty Jossy stood by Ghafsa’s feet outside of the bath. Ghafsa’s face had sweat droplets traced onto the sides of her temples. Her red bob was now a boy's cut, so there was no way for her hair to be tied up. She could feel the weight of her now wet, pink, nighty, clinging to her thighs. “Aaaahh! It kommie uitie!” she screamed, pushing her feet against the edges of the bath almost an hour later in the same water, still fighting with the baby to leave her womb. Aziz attempted to rub the back of her head, but every time he tried touching her Ghafsa exploded with a “huh uh!”

“Aunty Jossy, kan u nie net my maag oop sny nie! Asseblief! Die kind weier om uit te kom!” Ghafsa pleaded with the midwife. Aunty Jossy gently put her arms in the water and said, “Liefie, gee een harde stoot. Dit sal die laaste een wees,” and Ghafsa listened. She pushed, drawing strength from the solid walls of the bath even though it felt like a sheet of metal was cutting through her vagina until Aunty Jossy pulled the baby out and Ghafsa could hear a cry. The whole neighbourhood could probably hear that loud screech.

“Aw te yinne, man. Sy lyk net soos haar ouma,” Aunty Jossy said as she took the scissors from the towel next to her, to cut the umbilical cord. She used a different, softer towel to wrap around the baby and handed her to Ghafsa, who was still partially in the water. The newborn, still screaming, made it hard for Ghafsa to hear what Aunty Jossy said. So she repeated it, and finally, when Ghafsa heard, she said, “Alhamdulillah. Jy is net so harregat soos jou ma nè,” Those were her first words to her first daughter.



1987

Being a mommy isn't as bad as I thought it would be. I actually like it. Aziz said I must stay at home and look after Fatima. So, I thought I might as well have another one. We don't party at all anymore. He is always busy at work and some nights he comes very late home. I don't tell Mammie them that. They will sooner think he's busy doing sketchy stuff. Plus, Mammie is already having her suspicions ever since I dropped out of Hewat. She thinks I was forced to stop studying. I wasn't. I am my own person. Obviously, I feel a bietjie swak that the one thing I had going for me was being a teacher, and I was so close to becoming that and now it's gone. But that is marriage. Aziz pays for my needs and my children are my friends. There's no need for me to still go and look for more in life. My two babies keep me company and yoh, they keep me busy. I sometimes miss not having any children. It gets a bietjie boring, this routine of waking up looking after the children, making food. I wonder if this is the part after the 'happily ever after' in the stories.

Ghafsa was busy cleaning up the kitchen when she heard a glass shattering in the lounge.

“Wat het julle nou weer gebreek!” she called out to her two daughters. After Fatima, her first daughter, was born, she enjoyed being a housewife since she had constant baby company and decided to stop taking her birth control pills. Just short of a year later, Ayesha was born.

“Hoogaali gaali, mommy's lekker gonna skêl you,” Fatima told her younger sister after she hit the vase off the table while setting it. “No Fatima, don't lie!” Ayesha responded nervously. Ghafsa walked in to see what broke, “Jou pa gaan vir julle neek! That was the only thing your daddy had left of his mommy, julle twee se ouma. Yous better see that you explain to him nicely when he comes home.”

The two girls were bickering over who was going to tell Aziz that they just broke the last thing that his late mother left for him. “Hmmm, wat ryk so lekker?” Aziz said as he walked

in with his nose in the air. “Salaamualaykum my babies, how was school today?” he asked the girls. Fatima went over to her father and took his shoes off after he sat down on their maroon two-seater couch. “It was lekker. My teacher said we can stay at home tomorrow because they gonna make a lot of noise outside the school,” Fatima stated. Ghafsa jumped into the conversation. “Loud noises? Waarvan praat die kind? Jy lieg mos man.” Fatima gave a deep sigh and rolled her eyes at her mother. “I’m not! Mommy know when they stand with the boards and shout and sing. My teacher said they gonna do that just ask her.” Ghafsa burst into laughter and Aziz smirked along with her. “Haai my kind. That is called a strike,” she said when she caught her breath again.

Ayesha sat down on the carpet in front of Aziz’s feet and suddenly started crying. “Ghafsa! Kom kyk hier. Jou kind speel alweer mal,” Aziz called out to Ghafsa who came walking into the lounge. “Nee Ayesha. Moenie nou kom huil nie. Sê vir jou pa wat julle twee aangevang het.” “Huh uh, mommy. Don’t say ‘julle twee’ it was Ayesha it wasn’t me,” Fatima butted in, “Ayesha broke ouma’s vase daddy.”

Aziz’s ears turned red as his nostrils flared up. He got up to look for the vase on the wooden table that was neatly set for supper. “Ghafsa. Waar is die vase?” he turned to his wife. “Fatima het dan vir jou nou gesê, hulle het dit gebreek,” she responded. Aziz pulled the tablecloth off the table, and the four see-through plates and glasses scattered across the brown-carpeted floor. “Hoe kan jy vir hulle allow om so kak aan te vang! Jy weet my ma het daai vir my gegee!” he started barking at Ghafsa. She stood still, while Ayesha cried in the background. Fatima pulled Ayesha, trying not to cry. “Aziz calm down kanala. It was an accident and -” Ghafsa attempted to finish her sentence, but Aziz kept shouting at her. Telling her that it was her fault because she was not watching the children. Ghafsa just stood there,

not a tear in her eyes. She knew that it wasn't her fault. And she knew that it was an accident – and it was only a vase. A mere symbol of his mother, not his actual mother. It was not something that was big enough to use as an excuse to lash out at your wife and kids. So, she stood there, watching him pick up his packet of Rothmans Mild from the table and storm through the front door.

“Fatima gaan haal 'n besem. Ayesha, keep the skoppie for her. Then you set the table kanala, the food is almost done,” Ghafsa told her two daughters as she walked back to the kitchen. “Tietie, I didn't mean to make daddy so angry,” Ayesha told Fatima. “Ja, can you see, now they think it's me also. I soema hit you. You better clean our room tomorrow to make up for it,” Fatima profited off Ayesha's mistake.

Ghafsa brought the food out and put it on the lounge table. “Mommy, is Daddy going to be angry at me forever?” Ayesha mumbled innocently. “Nee moenie versin wees nie. He will come back inside now-now, he seker went to go smoke,” Ghafsa responded. She dished the girls' food, then stood up from her chair and said, “Eat so long. I'm going to call daddy. Bismillah Ayesha.” With her four fingers, she scooped a portion from Ayesha's plate and fed it to her before walking through the sliding door into the yard.

When Ghafsa got to the outside, she saw Aziz standing with a cigarette in his mouth, looking down into the engine of one of the cars that he was working on. “Aziz, hulle is maar net kinders. You can't go on like that in front of them,” she told him. He took a last skyf of his cigarette, threw it on the floor, and closed the bonnet of the silver Corolla. “Dan moet jy verseker maak dat hulle nie kak aan vang nie. You sit on your gat whole day at home but can't even watch the children properly.”

Aziz walked back inside the house, and Ghafsa followed. She started sweeping the leftover rice from Ayesha's plate back into the pyrex. Ghafsa did this ever since her father, Boebie passed away right before Ayesha was born. She was reminded how often she got a pak from him whenever she wasted even just a little bit of her rice. She smiled, longing for one more pak from her daddy, as she thought about how empty her mother must feel staying alone in a house with Tasneem and her new family. Aziz sat down at the head of the table waiting to be served. "Moet ek vir jou kos opskep? Ghafsa asked her husband, pretending that he did not just lose his marbles fifteen minutes earlier. "Kanala bokkie," he nonchalantly responded.

"Ek dink ek wil my teaching certificate klaar maak. Ek het gedink miskien as die kinders groter raak dan sal ek die company baie mis," Ghafsa said to Aziz later that night in bed while he was getting undressed. "En nou? Ek het altyd vir jou gesê jy kan dit klaar maak. Maak net verseker dat jy by die huis bly tot die kinders groot is," Aziz commanded. When Ghafsa fell pregnant with Fatima, she was in her final year of completing her teaching certificate. She only had one module left. But as soon as Aziz found out that she was pregnant, he instructed her to drop out. Rhoda, her mother, was disappointed, because she knew Ghafsa was someone that did not give in to anybody. It was the first time that she saw her daughter gracefully obeying someone's commands. "Nou OK dan. Ek sal môre in gaan en saam met hulle gaan praat. Miskien sal hulle toelaat dat ek sommer die jaar kan begin," Ghafsa told Aziz, trying her best to hide her excitement about getting a life again. "En wat van die kinders?" he asked. "Kan jy nie vir hulle saam met jou vat nie? Ek sal nie baie lank wees nie. Ek sal sommer 'n lift saam met Zulfa vat, sy sal môre in gaan," Ghafsa responded, and Aziz agreed to take care of the girls the next day.

The morning of the 11th of February arrived. Ghafsa was dressed and ready, and she had made sure that her daughters were too. In her one hand was a brown folder with all her documents inside. She had made sure not to forget anything so that there would be no reason for the college to reject her application. Aziz was still in the shower when Ghafsa spoke to the girls. “Julle moet goeie kinders vandag wees né. Don’t irritate your daddy too much,” she lectured the two girls. “I will fetch you by Uncle Manie later. Your daddy said he will drop you there when he must work.” Zulfa, her old school friend, who was in her final year of college, arrived shortly after in her green Uno and hooted for the entire minute that it took for Ghafsa to walk out of the house. “Moet jy altyd so dramatic wees! Have a bietjie sabr Zulfa,” she belted.

Back inside the house, Aziz’s frustration started building up not even an hour later because every time he went out to work on one of the cars outside, Ayesha would hurt herself with his tools. “Kom! Gaan roep vir jou suster. I’m gonna take you somewhere,” he snarled at Ayesha.

Aziz and the girls hopped into his red BMW and drove down Victoria Road. Even though it was a Wednesday morning, Busy Corner lived up to its name. The corner was packed with stalletjies situated under green and yellow gazebos, some of which sold boerewors rolls and others which sold a variety of clothing items. Fatima rolled down the window of the car, inviting a whiff of urine and braai smoke combined to waft in. All that went through Aziz’s mind was the silver Corolla that was standing idle at home. He needed to finish it by the end of the day, but his daughters were too lastag to allow him to finish it. He took a right turn onto Prince George Drive and eventually landed up in Southfield, at a peach single-story house that was protected by a peach wall with a silver gate. It was Manie, Aziz’s brother’s

house. “Julle kan hier by Uncle Manie bly. Net vir twee ure. Just two hours then I’ll come pick you up again nè Ayesha?” Aziz told the girls as he opened the back doors for them.

Manie came out with two women, one whom he was holding around the shoulder, and the other one was directly next to her. “Aziz. Salaam my bru, hoe gaan dit?” he asked Aziz as he shook his hand. “Nee, ek is alright my broer. Ghafsa het college toe gegaan. Nou is die girls saam met my. Ek moet daai kar klaar maak by die huis man. Kan hulle nie gou by jou bly nie?” Aziz asked his brother. “Yoh. Ek het visitors. Die is Saarah en haar suster, Firdous,” Manie gestured at Firdous and winked at Aziz. Aziz introduced himself to both girls but held onto Firdous’s hand longer than Saarah’s. Firdous’s long red nails matched the red lipstick that she had on. Aziz was distracted by the flick of her long black hair until the girls ran towards the stoep to greet their uncle. “Here’s my two babas,” Manie said as he embraced the girls for a hug. Aziz kissed Fatima and Ayesha before they went inside with their Uncle and his friend Saarah. As he walked away, he told Firdous, “I will see you again later. Then we can get to know each other,” and winked at her.

On the other side of the Southern Suburbs in Athlone, Ghafsa and Zulfa were leaving the college building in excitement to be studying together again. “Don’t you want to take me to fetch the girls by Manie, then drop me by my mommy kanala man?” Ghafsa requested from Zulfa. “Jirre, jy dink ek is ’n taxi. Get in,” Zulfa responded. The two women drove back to Southfield to fetch the girls. When they arrived at the house Zulfa hooted and Ghafsa got out of the Uno to fetch her daughters. As she walked down the concrete pathway toward the front of the house, Manie and the girls came outside and closed the door quickly behind him. “Hai Manie. Wie is dan in die huis dat jy so secretive moet wees,” Ghafsa joked. “Nee man. Is maar net ’n vriendin,” he responded to her and kissed Fatima and Ayesha goodbye.

1991

Maybe there is someone else. But I don't dwell on it. He comes home every day and the girls love him. They get so excited to see him. And he still supports us. Yes, I get a few klappe here and there but it's nothing I can't handle. Plus, in that moment I always remember what Mammie used to say, "Marriage is nie speelgoed nie." So, it's fine man. I am doing what a good Muslim woman would do. I am staying at home and looking after my children. Last year, I finally found a teaching post. It wasn't even two months later that I fell pregnant again. Babies are from Allah and I'm grateful, really. But I still think to myself, if only I went to go get my birth control myself instead of waiting for Aziz to get it for me. Now I am persevering with lots of sabr. Yes, my fairytale is a bietjie rocky. But maybe in Snow White, Prince Charming kissed another girl after he kissed her. That wouldn't mean that he didn't love her. I mean, he darem loved her so much that he could wake her up from that sleep spell. I don't even know. The days just pass me by and next thing I know, it's a new year and a new baby crying for my tits also. I just take everything as it comes now. There is no use fighting against what Allah has put into my path.

Ghafsa sat on her double bed while, Zainab, her new toddler, was effortlessly suckling on her mother's nipples. "Waar is Aziz?" Ghafsa's sister Tasneem asked her. "Die is die vierde keer wat ek hier kom en hy is alweer nie hier nie." Ghafsa's eyes were packed with black bags under them, ready to start flowing with tears. Her hair was stuck in a triangle against her forehead, like a freshly-fried samoosa that just came out of hot oil. She sighed in response to Tasneem's question. "Agh Tas, ek het nie meer energy to ask him where he is the whole time. Soe lank hy na die kinders sorg," Ghafsa replied.

Just as their conversation ended, Rhoda, their mother, walked in. She was ageing faster ever since Boebie had passed away. Her doek was draaiëd to the back, though half of it kept sliding down, covering her left eye from time to time. Her daughters left it as it was. They did not find the need to bother her with unnecessary things like that. She brought a glass of

boiling water to Ghafsa after she complained about having stomach cramps. Rhoda slowly and shakily put the glass down on the pedestal next to the bed. “Laat ek vir Mammie help,” Tasneem attempted, but Rhoda shooed her away. “Gee vir haar bietjie van die,” she gestured to the water. Zainab was Ghafsa’s third child, so naturally she thought it would be easier than with the previous two. But that was not the case. The moment that she pushed Zainab out, she knew there was a problem. Zainab left Ghafsa’s womb quietly. The doctors were not sure why. They said it could just be a “delayed response,” but Zainab had remained quiet. That was part of the reason why Ghafsa was so tired. She kept a constant watch on Zainab. She was not harregat like the other two girls, and Ghafsa was not used to this.

“Salaamualaykum,” Aziz walked in and kissed Rhoda. “Het jy geëet?” she asked him. “Ja Mammie, gaan rus lekker, moenie oor my worry nie,” he responded, and moved aside for Rhoda to walk past him. Tasneem rolled her eyes, making it known that she was annoyed at the exchange just after Rhoda had left the room. “Ek was by my broer, Manie,” he said to a very suspicious-looking Tasneem. “Jy is meer by Manie, dan wat jy hier by ons is. I wonder what or rather who you do there that’s so lekker,” Ghafsa immediately regretted her words remembering the first blue eye that he gifted her when she just hinted at him cheating.

“Moenie kak praat saam met my nie! Ek moet nou met jou insecurities deal,” the words spat out of Aziz’s mouth and Ghafsa’s heart started beating faster. She looked at Tasneem nervously, making duah in her head that Tasneem did not sense the fear that she had felt. Fear of her family finding out that Aziz was not the most peaceful communicator. “Tasneem,” Ghafsa said, “Ek dink Mammie wag vir jou. It’s getting late. Yous must go.” Tasneem opened her mouth to attempt to argue back, but then she caught a glimpse of Ghafsa’s hand that was discretely saying “please go now!”

Ghafsa placed Zainab on the floor and walked Rhoda and Tasneem out. When she closed the front door, she walked straight into the lounge and told Fatima and Ayesha to go to their room and put the TV on. Then she walked back to her own room, passing the portrait of her wedding day in the passageway. The nur that shone on Aziz's face the day of the wedding reminded Ghafsa of the story that her father had once told her about the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The story of how he would lay in Aisha's lap when she was on her period. The few seconds that she had walking past the portrait also reminded her of her first year of marriage. Each time she was on her period, Aziz would rub her back and always bring her a cup of tea to bed. She loved this about him, since he mirrored the image of the Prophet (SAW).

“Kom hier jy!” Aziz pulled Ghafsa by her hair, his grip loosening with each pull of force thanks to her oily hair. She snapped out of her thoughts, pulled his grip from her hair and responded with a very stubborn, “Is jy mal! Los my af!” Aziz was still astounded that after so many years of dictating, and abusing her, she was still so harregat. He couldn't do anything about it. So, he let her walk away, still attempting to assert his dominance by getting the last say, “Daai is die laaste keer dat jy my soos 'n poes voor jou familie laat lyk, hoor jy?”

The next morning, as Ghafsa was washing Zainab in the basin, Aziz walked in and kissed his wife on her oily head. “As jy wil hê jou ma moet hier kom slaap, dan is dit fine nè,” he told her. He always followed his violent behaviour with a way of “making up” by giving Ghafsa something that he knew she wanted. Perhaps that is why she was ok with an occasional outburst of violence. “Ek sal dit baie lyk. Mammie kan agter Fatima and Ayesha kyk terwyl ons by die werk is,” she smiled while rubbing the white lappie against the quiet Zainab's bare bum.

At 68 years old, Rhoda's health was not in the best of places, but she was still attempting to act as though it was. Ghafsa must have learned her stubbornness from her parents. A few weeks after Aziz's kind invitation, Ghafsa decided to invite her mother to move in with them. Rhoda's daughters often found humour in her random rollercoaster of stories, and sometimes did not know if they should believe them or not. When Zainab reached the one-year mark, Ghafsa resumed her teaching post again. Rhoda would look after Zainab, which was an easy task, considering that she was not like any of her other grandchildren. Zainab was still a quiet toddler. Occasionally you would get a smile, if you were lucky, but never a laugh or a cry. A crying face, yes. But not an actual cry.

On the 7th of September, Ghafsa left at 5:00 to hitch-hike a ride to Retreat, where she would then meet Zulfa, still acting as her chauffeur, who gave her a lift to her new job at False Bay Primary School. Rhoda got Fatima and Ayesha ready for school, and Aziz dropped them off and came back home, where he would work for the rest of the day in the backyard, turned workshop, to respray one of his customer's cars. At around noon, Rhoda heard a scream from the outside of the front gate. She called Aziz who was covered in black paint, nonchalantly walking toward the front gate. From afar, Aziz did not recognize the woman who was patiently waiting for him outside of the gate. She stood with a baby on her arm, who couldn't be more than one year old. As he got closer to the gate, his eyes widened, realizing that he had seen this woman once before. Last year, when Ghafsa was settling into her new job, Aziz had a race to go to at Killarney. Naturally, Ghafsa was too tired to accompany him. After the dices, Aziz met Yusra in the stands, where they decided to leave the racetrack together and venture to a different location. It was the first and last time that he saw her. Until now.

“Wat gaan nou aan? Hoe kan jy na my huis toe kom?” Aziz asked anxiously. “I know you probably don't want anything to do with us, especially since the first time I met you was also the last time that I saw you. But I thought you should at least meet your child,” the woman said nervously. Aziz blew his cheeks up, then deflated them with pressure. He looked behind him toward the house and saw his mother-in-law watching them. “How can you tell me now? You had a whole year to do it! Jy kon my net sowel nie vertel het nie!” he exclaimed. Yusra looked at her feet, “I didn't wanna break up your home. But it's getting hard for me now to look after her alone.” Aziz scratched his head then clenched his fists, “Ek sal vir jou iets gee om na jousef en die baba te kyk. Please don't come back here. Kanala. Wag net hier,” he said before walking back into the house, passing Rhoda, and going straight into his room.

He unlocked his safe that was inside one of the cupboards and took out the stack of R100s that he got from selling a fixed-up Mazda last month. He walked to the kitchen and opened a few different drawers before finally finding the one that had the empty Shoprite packets in. He took one and stashed the stack of cash in the wrinkled Shoprite packet, sealing it with a knot. As he walked back out of the house, he passed Rhoda again. This time, placing his hand on her shoulder and giving her a sincerely apologetic look. When he reached the woman outside, he gave her the packet, turned around, and walked back inside the house.

It was around 17:30 when Ghafsa walked through the driveway and into the passage of the house after a tiring day of dealing with wailing schoolkids. “Waar is my familie?” she called out. Fatima and Ayesha, still in their school clothes, came running toward her, as she welcomed them with a hug. Rhoda walked in with a smiling, still quiet, Zainab on her arm, and handed her over to Ghafsa. Rhoda immediately turned around and left the passage, turning into the kitchen. Ghafsa found this odd. She started noticing the unfamiliar quietness

that the house held. No radio was playing, no stove was burning, and her mother did not say one word to her about how long she took to get home. Ghafsa walked into the lounge and placed Zainab down on the carpet. “Watch Zainab quickly,” she said to Fatima.

“Mammie?” Ghafsa called. “Praat met jou man voor jy saam met my praat,” Rhoda responded. Ghafsa felt her legs go lame, so she put her hand on the wall for support before coming back to her senses. She thought about what could have gone wrong while she was at work. Did her husband hit her mother? Did he hit the kids? The only thing she could do now was find him. And find out what created this unhomely environment. She took a deep breath – “Bismillah,” she whispered.

“Aziz?” she called out as she stepped over the multitude of car parts that were scattered on the cement floor of the backyard. Aziz lifted his head from under the bonnet of the engine he was working on. His face looked different. For such a dark man, his complexion looked pale. Ghafsa had not seen his face like that before. “Is alles alright?” she asked. “Het jou ma vir jou iets gesê?” he countered her question. “No, sy’t gesê ek moet vir jou kom vra,” Ghafsa retorted. Aziz tapped his box of Rothmans Mild until a cigarette popped halfway out, then he used his mouth to pull it out and lit it. He sat on the bonnet of one of the cars and told Ghafsa to sit down next to him. “Onthou jy daai aand wanneer ek Killarney toe gegaan het, en jy was by die huis saam met die kinders?” he started. “Waarvan praat jy nou Aziz?” Ghafsa was confused. “Luister net Ghafsa. Dit was in die eerste week wanneer jy skool begin het. Laat ek net klaar praat kanala,” he continued.

Ghafsa sat quietly, listening as her husband explained that he had had an affair: It took just one normal night of racing without her, to have sex with someone that he had just met. All

because she was not there that night. He felt remorseful and regretful. But mostly, he felt fear. Fear that his family would fall apart. Fear that his wife would leave him. She did not need him anymore. She made enough money as a teacher to support herself now. She was independent. She was harregat. He wasn't anything special. She had driven him away. So, he sat there, fearful, but expecting her to forgive him, without offering her an apology. "So ja, I gave her money to look after the baby. She won't come between our family again," he tried reassuring her after he noticed her lack of response. Ghafsa was still sitting on the bonnet next to him. Her eyes scanned the backyard cars. Her backyard that she so wished to plant a garden in, was cemented and filled with cars. She thought that this was the perfect moment to leave him. She had a stable income, yes. But she gave some of her money to Rhoda, and here and there, used it for the house when Aziz wasn't around. She might have enough left to look after herself? Maybe.

Then she was reminded of her mother. Would Rhoda's health get worse after learning about the terrible husband that her baby daughter had? It would probably affect her health once she learned that Ghafsa no longer had a man to look after her. Though Aziz wasn't the best caretaker as a husband, she thought. But Rhoda didn't need to know that. Why ruin the bit of peace she now had after raising six daughters. Yes, Ghafsa was harregat. But that same stubbornness that she held in her life could get her through her marriage until her mother passed. And at least, until her children were old enough to understand. She could do this. Just a few more years.

"Ok," she said as she tapped him on his shoulder ... and walked coolly back inside.

1996

It was 36 degrees outside, and the entire area of Grassy Park was covered in sunshine and sweat, so Ghafsa decided to put the sprinkler on in the middle of the driveway, for the girls to cool down while they were playing outside. Zainab, who was now six years old, ran from Ayesha, who was chasing her with a ladybug on her finger, while Fatima sat on the edge of the pathway playing her Tetris game. Zainab was still a quiet child, but they soon realised that she has a big mouth on her when she had lus. She just chose not to use it as often. Ghafsa thought she might have inherited the late Boebie's dry personality.

Rhoda had moved into her other daughter, Salwa's house after she found out that Aziz was two-timing her daughter. Since then, Aziz's relationship with Ghafsa's family was almost non-existent. Ghafsa stayed by his side though, and ignored the advice that her family gave her. Harregat mos. All round. Too stubborn to give her family the satisfaction of giving them what they wanted for her. She thought of herself as strong enough to endure the trials of this life. But when it felt like it was getting too much, she comforted herself by saying, "Dit is nog altyd hulle pa." Her children were too young to witness a divorce and become another one of those coloured children who starts acting out because they're lacking one of their parents. Who would stand in front for them when they made salaah?

It was getting closer to maghrib time, so Ghafsa called the girls to dry up and come back inside. Fatima, who was at the height of teenagerhood now, ignored her mother's call and continued building the blocks of her game. Ayesha yanked Zainab by her arm in an attempt to pull her inside, but her body remained as stiff as as the vibracrete in the front of their house. Her shoulders were raised, and so was her head, while her mouth remained open. She took short, fast breaths. "Mommy! Zainab doesn't wanna come!" Ayesha called out. "Ai, die

kind nè,” Ghafsa got off the plastic chair, leaving a round print of sweat behind, and walked over to Zainab. When she saw that her baby was struggling to breathe, she picked her up and ran inside the house. Fatima’s attention was finally commanded by Ghafsa’s call for help. Fatima called Aziz and after twenty minutes, finally got hold of him and told him what had happened. During that time, Ghafsa took Zainab’s wet clothes off and replaced them with a hoody and tights. “Daddy’s coming now baba,” echoed in Zainab’s ears as she was being swayed back and forth by her mother. Ghafsa rocked Zainab in her arms to the same rhythm that her thoughts were dancing in. A flood of memories reminded her how utterly alone she was in this world. Ever since Aziz stopped working from home and started working by Manie’s, she hardly saw him. She couldn’t shake that feeling of loneliness. No matter how much she swayed with her baby in her arms, the thoughts would not leave her.

In less than an hour, Aziz arrived. Ghafsa and the girls were already waiting outside. Aziz drove off before the passenger door was properly closed, speeding from 160 to 180, to 200. That was when the car started to shake and the silence finally broke. “Die fokken kar!” Aziz exclaimed. Ghafsa shook her head, wondering how Zainab’s own father could use one of his client’s broken cars to rush her to the hospital, when he uses his own, in mint condition cars, for every other occasion. They turned off Prince George Drive and reached the M5 freeway. Ayesha was silently crying in Fatima’s arms, while Zainab, still quiet, and struggling to gasp for air, was in Ghafsa’s. It took only seven minutes for Aziz to make the journey from Grassy Park to Red Cross Hospital.

He pulled up in front of the entrance, unconcerned that it was reserved only for ambulances. The wheels of the car were spewing out smoke from the speed that the tyres had just endured. He grabbed Zainab out of Ghafsa’s hands and ran into the hospital with her. Ghafsa and the

girls followed. Ghafsa explained the situation to them since Aziz still did not know exactly what had happened. The nurse told them that they needed to wait. “I will come back now-now,” she said as she turned around to walk away. At that same moment, Zainab started throwing up, while her eyes rolled back. The nurse’s eyes expanded, “Come quick!” she finally said. Ghafsa took Zainab from Aziz and followed the nurse. The adrenaline that had been keeping Aziz energised and alert had started decreasing. He sat down next to Fatima and Ayesha, with his head in between his hands.

In the next room, Zainab lay flat on a table surrounded by nurses and a head doctor. Zainab was attached to an electronic vital sign monitor. The doctor checked the monitor and asked how long she had been breathing like that. Before he could get an answer, the monitor made a long *beeping* sound and the doctor called for a defibrillator. “Clear!” he shouted, before placing the paddles on Zainab’s chest, passing an electric current through her, but the monitor still showed a flatline. Ghafsa’s body felt weak. But she knew this was the wrong moment to choose weakness. “Again!” the doctor shouted. “Bismillah hir rahmaan hir raheem,” Ghafsa said under her breath. “Clear!” the doctor charged again, this time, the line on the monitor started forming a zig-zag pattern and the long *beep* sound made smaller, consecutive *beeps*. “Oh shucks! Gatta pattata!” slipped out of Zainab’s delirious mouth. Ghafsa burst into laughter, and for the first time, tears accompanied her emotions. “We’ll take care of your baba, Mommy,” the doctor smiled at her, as they wheeled Zainab out of the room.

Before Ghafsa left the room, she was reminded that she did not have a car of her own, even though her husband was known for his expertise in cars. She thought about the plenty cars that made their way in and out of her yard over the years, but not one of those cars ever became hers. It was his way of controlling her whereabouts. She got lost in thought, trailing

away to an imaginable future where she needed to take Zainab to the hospital and Aziz wouldn't be at home. He hardly was. And the fact that she had to phone him so late in the day to come home scared her. Was it time to leave him? Did harregat mean taking a different tack?

Ghafsa entered the waiting room again. Aziz's head was still stuck between his hands. "Mommy, where's Zainab?" Ayesha asked. Aziz finally lifted his head in anticipation of Ghafsa's response. "She's gonna be ok, alhamdulillah. They just need to run some tests now." She put her family's hearts at ease. "Ek gaan gou 'n skyf trek," Aziz said as he got up and left the emergency room. Ghafsa scoffed once he was out of hearing distance, "Ja. Gaan net weg hier, you mos good at that. The absent husband and father."

A few weeks later, Zainab was released from the hospital and back in her cosy home in Grassy Park. The doctors told Ghafsa that her lungs had only been using 40% of their capacity. They explained that, because she was so young, there was no way for her to know that her breath intake was abnormal. The only way she could cope was to use her breath sparingly, which turned out to be the reason that she hardly spoke. It was proven. In the subsequent days where she was on Prednisone, she did not stop talking. Zainab was diagnosed with chronic asthma. Every morning and evening, Ghafsa would use a plastic bottle that she cut open at the base and put an inhaler in it to make it easier for Zainab to take the shot of the pump.

"Jy weet mos wat jy moet nou doen," Aziz told Ghafsa while he sipped on a cup of tea next to her in the bed. She loathed these moments where they would have to share the same tight space for an entire night. On the one hand, she wanted him home, but, on the other, she

wanted to put as much distance between them as possible. Her stubbornness to move to the couch in the lounge held her body down on the mattress every night. For what must she leave her own bed? Even if it meant that he would force himself on her, she wouldn't give in. She wouldn't be the first one to leave the bruidskamer.

“How do you mean?” Ghafsa inquired in confusion. “You must stay at home. You can't go to work anymore. Jy moet agter jou kind kyk,” he stated. Ghafsa laughed, “Moenie so worry nie, my ma sal agter die kinders kyk terwyl ek by die skool is. I didn't study for nothing,” she responded. Aziz took the tea in its delicate China cup with rambling roses and threw it against the cupboard doors. The beige liquid dripped down the white cupboard doors as he spat the words out of his mouth, “Hou op so harregat wees! Ek is die man. En as ek sê jy moet by die huis bly, dan sal it so wees!”

The girls ran into the room inquiring about what was happening. “Nothing. Daddy's tea slipped out of his hands. Go back to sleep, dus skool môre.” Ghafsa's blood was boiling. She was burning to tell him to leave the house and never come back. She felt her motherly instincts slowly climb out of her body, allowing her to put herself first and leave her children's father. But then Zainab walked in. “Mommy, can I sleep by you and daddy tonight?” she asked, and Ghafsa's motherly instincts jumped back inside of her. She couldn't leave him. He was still their father, she thought.

2000

I went to Tasneem's house the other day to visit. But they didn't know I was coming. I heard her speak to Salwa about some of the people in the area asking Mammie about me. They heard Aziz was beating me and some said he was cheating on me. And they can't believe that I am still staying with him. But then Salwa said it's better so. I must stay with him. "What will the people say? They already asking Mammie questions," she said. What am I supposed to do? Everybody has their different opinions. This whole area is a bunch of skinnerbakkies. No one will come ask me if I'm ok, rather, go talk about it to each other then smile when they see me. So tweegevriet. But Tasneem and Salwa spoke to me about it after I walked in. Still, doesn't make it any better. Giving me instructions on what to do with my life but then they are hiding away their secrets of their marriages. At least I don't go to anyone for help. I can do this by myself. Allah knows what is in my heart.

The Grand Parade was the liveliest place in the CBD. The turret clock on the city hall chimed on the exact hour, but on that Wednesday afternoon, those chimes were too soft to hear compared to the noise of the street. Brokers from different branches of Cape Town set up their gazebos and self-made tables, while some opted to set up their items on tarpaulins on the ground at the Parade from 7:00. At 11:00, Ghafsa and her friend, Zulfa, were there, looking to spend their money in the most affordable and exciting way. The little chunks of chicken feet in the vomit spread over the gutters, and the strong stench of pee did not stop them from browsing through the stalletjies. There were more than a hundred stalletjies, and for every stalletjie that sold bags, another five sold those exact same bags at a competing price. This wasn't a problem for Ghafsa. She negotiated with every similar stall owner and made sure that she found a "better price."

Ghafsa and Zulfa continued walking, carrying their handbags against the surface of their navels with the palm of their hands over the other side of their bags. They knew that if they

were to let their hands go, they might be pickpocketed, and their cell phones would find their way to be sold on the wooden tables of one of the stalletjies. “Kom man Ghafsa, ek kry honger,” Zulfa complained. “Jy is so haastig!” Ghafsa responded. The two friends headed to the fisheries on the corner of the Parrara – Texies. Zulfa loaded her shopping bags on Ghafsa, who roamed about the pavement outside looking for a cleanish area to sit and wait for Zulfa to come back with a parcel.

The two sat down on the pavement and broke a piece of paper off the parcel to dish them a piece of hake accompanied by some chips. “Ghafsa, what’s new with you? I don’t see you anymore since you stopped working at False Bay. Raak jy nie bored by die huis nie?” Zulfa started. “Niemand hoor van jou nie. Niemand sien jou nie. Is jy alright my vriendin?” Ghafsa pulled a fish graat out of her mouth before opening it to speak. “Agh. Jy weet mos this is just how life is. Aziz is altyd by die werk. Fatima dink sy’s groot nou en Ayesha wil nes haar wees, so I must permy ruk them reg. Zainab is my only good child.”

Although Ghafsa said this in an attempt to quieten Zulfa’s worries, it was all true. Fatima was now seventeen years old in her final year of school. She did lower grade Maths, but she was still only scraping through. Her focus was more on her friends and causing nonsense. Ayesha followed in Fatima’s footsteps. Always trying to do what her tietie did. They were two peas in a pod, a vrot pod. But Zainab was an angel. Even though she was only ten years old, she passed grade five with flying colours, and was always the sweetest child who never backchatted. “But what about you Zulfa? You mos moved nuh. Hoe is it daar in die Crawford?” Ghafsa snapped out of her thoughts.

“Wiet jy wat. My neighbour told me she went to GrandWest mos. She isn’t Muslim, I don’t even know what she is. And the night she came back, she came to give me a R200! Ghafsa, I was shocked. I told her no I can’t take it, that is mos not halaal money. But I thought jinne, ek moet die vir Ghafsa vertel!” Zulfa said as she hit Ghafsa’s shoulder in excitement.

“Jy jok!” Ghafsa responded, now, also laughing. “That is not the worst part,” Zulfa continued, “The following weekend, she comes banging on the door for me. I open up and she asks me to please just take her somewhere, she will give me petrol money and she won’t be longer than a hour. I say ja it’s fine. Won’t this woman direct me to GrandWest!” At this point Ghafsa was in tears, laughing at the torture she thought Zulfa must have endured. Ghafsa and Zulfa continued their catch-up over their fish and chips parcel before packing up and getting into Zulfa’s Uno. “Gaan jy huis toe?” Zulfa asked. “Ja, die kinders is nog in die skool, then I can get ’n bietjie relaxing time to myself,” Ghafsa responded.

When Ghafsa walked through the pathway that led to the front door, she noticed that the gate was already open. She thought that Aziz must have come home to fetch something. He no longer had a workshop in the backyard. Ghafsa did not know if he was even still working on cars. He didn’t talk to her a lot, and he was hardly at home. But she liked it that way. It gave her time away from his violence. And besides, the girls were starting to notice his absence. This was better for her, she thought. If they saw for themselves that their father does not do a good job as a daddy, then maybe when she eventually divorced him, they would be able to understand why. Instead of thinking it was their fault, or Ghafsa’s fault.

Ghafsa turned the key to unlock the front door and heard something fall on the floor inside the house. Instead of turning away and calling for help, she ran towards what sounded like a

suspicious scene. “Aziz? Is jy hier?” Ghafsa called out. She heard a rush of feet stamping the floor and looked through the serving hatch into the kitchen. Her eyes met with three young boys and two girls who were climbing on top of her counter tops and escaping through the window. “Fatima! Kom hier nou!” She knew that that was the work of her two delinquent daughters. Both Fatima and Ayesha walked out of the room accompanied by a strong whiff of dagga. Before Fatima could open her mouth, Ghafsa grabbed the closest thing to her, which was a Tupperware bakkie that was placed on the serving hatch.

Ghafsa did not hit her daughter. She moered her. It was the biggest pak that Fatima received, and she received a lot. Ayesha’s lips started trembling when she saw that Fatima was being beaten up. At the perfect moment when Ayesha finally looked up, she made eye contact with her mother. “En jy! You want to mos do everything your sister do! Nou kom hier! Jy kan ook so ’n pak kry soos jou suster!” Ghafsa dived for Ayesha, eager to give her the same punishment as her sister. Instead of standing still the same way Fatima did, and gracefully accepting her punishment, Ayesha ran to the bathroom and locked the door behind her. It was the only room that had a lock on. Ghafsa laughed at Ayesha’s attempt to escape. “Slaap sommer daar in die badkamer. Jy kry niks kos vanaand nie!”

Later that day, Ghafsa went to the kitchen to start supper when Zainab walked in. “Salaam my child. How was school today?” she asked her youngest child. “It was fine,” Zainab smiled and kissed her mother on her cheek. Ghafsa opened the freezer to take out meat, but her eyes were met with half a pack of green peas and a tray of ice blocks. She walked to her room and took out her navy-blue Nokia 3310 to call her husband. It was just ringing. She tried again. Still, no answer. Ghafsa walked to her handbag which lay on her double bed and opened her purse. She sighed in relief when she saw that she had one R20 note and enough coins that

made up a R10. That was enough for a bread and a block of cheese, she thought. “Mommy, what’s for supper?” Fatima asked. “Do you think I want to make your supper now? You wanted to be stout, now you can eat cheese and bread,” Ghafsa exclaimed, silently feeling grateful to Fatima’s naughtiness that she could hide the fact that they did not have anything else to eat. “Hier. Gaan koop ’n brood en ’n blokkie kaas,” she instructed Fatima.

Later that night, when the road was quiet and the Jabaar house was asleep, Aziz came in. He unlocked the front door and went straight into the main bedroom, where Ghafsa was asleep and Zainab next to her. Aziz started kissing Ghafsa, until she finally woke up. “Aziz, waar was jy heeldag?” she pushed him off and sat up in her bed. “Haai Ghafsa, jy het nie vir my die heeldag gesien nie en nou wil jy weer moan,” he responded. She shook her head side to side. “Ons het niks kos in die yskas nie! En ek werk nie, I don’t have money to feed your children!” Aziz took her face in his hands and said, “Ek sal vir jou geld gee Ghafsa,” and continued kissing her. Ghafsa closed her eyes, attempting to enjoy it so that it could end quickly, but then she caught a glimpse of a red patch in his neck. “Wat te fok is daai?” she snapped at Aziz, pointing toward the love bite that was cemented in his neck. A flash of anger covered Aziz’s face as he took a deep breath in, then pulled Ghafsa out of the bed by her hair. “Wil jy rêrig baklei?” he asked her.

Ghafsa took the copper ashtray that was sitting on her pedestal and held it high in the air. “Don’t come closer. Ek sal jou met die asbak gooi!” she warned him. “Jy is ’n mal meid! Where do you think I am all the time? Natuurlik sal ek iemand anders kry as jy wil niks saam met my doen nie!” he shouted. Zainab woke up and Ghafsa called for Fatima to take Zainab out of the room. The three girls sat in their bedroom behind a closed door, already trained to blast the TV on its loudest. “Aziz. How can I go to dices with you? To clubs with you? I have

three children I must look after every day! Waar moet ek die tyd kry om te gaan dans!”

Ghafsa felt her voice shaking, and quickly swallowed her spit in an attempt to maintain the façade of her strength that was slowly running out. “Are you seeing that woman again? The one that you made a baby with?” Aziz pushed Ghafsa against the cupboard doors and ringed his hand around her neck. “Luister na my, daai vrou is uit my lewe. I don’t see her or that bastard child!” he assured her before finally letting his hand go. “Sit jou klere aan, ek wil jou iets wys,” he instructed her and, after another smack to her face, she eventually obeyed.

Aziz opened the passenger side of his new Mercedes for Ghafsa to get in. “Mommy’s coming now! Fatima asseblief laat niemand in kom nie!” Ghafsa instructed Fatima as she left the responsibility of her children and her home in the care of an irresponsible seventeen-year-old’s hands. Aziz was quiet during the car ride, and the more Ghafsa tried asking him where he was taking her, the further the needle leaped on the speedometer of the car. They reached the area of Ottery and turned down a one-way road, where Aziz finally stopped the car in front of a yellow house that had a large garden in the front. He never failed to surprise her with his unpredictable nature.

“En nou? Wie bly hier?” Ghafsa inquired. “Jy. Jy sal hier bly,” Aziz responded definitively.

Ghafsa got out of the car and walked up to the dark green gate and stared at the house.

Although the road was dark, the streetlamps provided enough light for Ghafsa to see the house clearly. It was everything that she could have wanted. The garden was divided by the pathway. On the left of the pathway, was a massive patch of grass with plants, flowers and trees planted along it, that followed the shape of a half-moon. On the right side of the pathway, was another patch of grass. A little rectangular garden. This was situated directly

next to a driveway, where Ghafsa imagined her car would park one day; when she finally got one.

“Rêrig Aziz? Haai, maar jy is baie nice nè!” Ghafsa could not contain her happiness, and, as a matter of fact, she did not feel as if she needed to. Her previous argument had disappeared from her head. This was one of those occasions where Aziz would give her something to make up for his violence, she thought. “Ek is bly dat jy die huis lyk. I will put the lease in your name, but I’ll pay the rental every month. Maar Ghafsa, ek sal nie elke dag hier wees nie,” Aziz said wearily. Ghafsa turned around from looking at the house and faced Aziz again, who was still in the driver’s seat of the car. “Hoe mean jy dan nou?” she asked. “Kom terug kar toe. Laat ons huis toe gaan, ek sal vir jou in die kar verduidelik,” he instructed.

Ghafsa felt an ache in her stomach when he said that. She could feel that something was wrong. The moment reminded her of the time when Aziz told her about the child he made with another woman. Ghafsa’s head pounded with tension as she pushed her sweaty fringe back from her forehead. “Asseblief, moenie nou mal raak nie. Just listen quietly till I’m finished talking,” Aziz instructed again.

The drive back to their house in Victoria Road was a long one. Ghafsa just wanted to jump out of the car and run away, but she knew that she had three children who were waiting for her back at home. Aziz explained to her that he met another woman some time last year. He emphasised that it was one of the nights when he asked her to go with him but she said that she was too tired. That was why he met another woman. If she had gone with him, he would not have met her. He would not have cheated again. It was mostly her fault, he said.

Aziz did not say a lot about the other woman, just that she was somewhat of a socialite. She enjoyed being where the eye could see, so she was always up for anything. That drew Aziz towards her. She knew he already had a wife, and she was ok with it. He spent most of his time with her anyways, so she didn't have to worry about him going back to his first wife. Besides, this was her second marriage. She got divorced around the same time that she met Aziz. Six months after they saw each other, she told him she was pregnant. He responded by proposing to her, and followed it by marrying her in secret. That led him to this moment. He thought that it was time to let Ghafsa know that he had another baby on the way, and this time, he would be in the baby's life. She had to understand. He would finally be having a son. Something that Ghafsa couldn't give him.

Ghafsa was too overwhelmed with anger to move. She thought about how obstinate she had made herself, for a man, who so easily moved on to another woman. If she had just left him the moment he first laid his hands on her, or the moment that she first found out that he had had an affair, then her life would have been different. It was too late now. She had no job. She had to stay with him, for the sake of her children. The first thing Ghafsa had to do now was get a job, then make an appointment at the MJC. There was no reason besides her financial situation to stay with him. Her daughters would understand once they heard about this.

The car finally stopped in front of their house in Grassy Park, and Ghafsa broke her silence. "So, what about me and your daughters?" she asked. "What about you? I am still your husband. Ek is nog altyd hulle pa. Ghafsa," he sighed before speaking again, "Jy weet Allah sê in die Qur'an a man can take more than one wife." Ghafsa stared at him mindlessly, shocked that this man who had spent months fornicating would reference a verse from the

Qur'an. As if his entire marriage to her had been living up to Islam. "Nothing will change, don't worry. The new house in Ottery will soon be ready for us to move in. We will still be a family," he reassured her.



2002

I knew that my Mills & Boon stories weren't real, but that didn't mean that I still didn't want it. It was nice to live in my Fanta blikkie sometimes reading the stories of how the man would woo the woman and they would live happily ever after. Mammie always used to tell me that getting married "Issie speelgoed nie." True. But why must it be a punishment. Zulfa is very educated when it comes to the Deen, and she always says your spouse must be your peace. And I can't stop thinking about it. Would Allah really make the Earth shake if me and Aziz got divorced? Even though he isn't my peace. I dunno. So, what if they all think I'm harregat. I am patient. Allah said I must have sabr, so why must I listen to other people when they say I must leave him. It's so easy for everyone to just say that. As if they are going to be the ones to explain to their children why they only have a mommy.

The little green gate in front of Ghafsa's new house in Ottery led to a greyish concrete pathway that looked like the blocks you drew in a hopscotch game. Zainab and her friends used chalk to draw numbers on each block and used it as hopscotch tiles. On the right side of the pathway was a patch of grass that always had white popo arranged on it from the stray dogs in the area. On the left side of the pathway was a garden that mimicked a botanical garden with all the different colours it displayed. You couldn't access that garden from the green gate though. You needed to walk right down the pathway to enter the garden. It was a private little area of peace, restricted only to those who lived there. Ghafsa sat on the black cobbled stoep that was just outside of the front door, before the garden, on a red bankie, smoking a Stuyvesant Extra Mild and reading her Mills & Boon novels that she still, 21 years later, took out at the library every Tuesday. She thought that if she couldn't get her fairytale romance in real life, she might as well escape into Mills & Boon. It helped keep her sane in the midst of her marital problems and her domestic life. It was school holidays, so Zainab and Ayesha were at home, while Fatima was at varsity.

“Mommy, when is daddy coming back home?” Zainab innocently inquired. Ayesha tried calling Zainab away from her mother. She knew that any questions about Aziz were a big no. The last time that any one of them had inquired about Aziz’s whereabouts, Ghafsa shouted at them in frustration with, “HOW MUST I KNOW? HE IS YOUR DADDY!” Ghafsa wasn’t particularly proud of that moment. It was one of those days where she felt useless, with no direction in life. She was at the point where she did not know what she was doing with her life anymore. Her days consisted of only making food and cleaning up after making food.

Ghafsa lowered her romance novel, and looked at Zainab. “My kind. When I know he is coming, you will be the first person I will tell,” Ghafsa said before raising her book back up to continue reading. Ghafsa did not know what else to tell her kids. The last time that Aziz came to visit was a month ago, and before that, it was two months ago. He was inconsistent in their lives, but Ghafsa could not leave him. She did not have an income and she could not get one because she wasn’t going to run to anyone to ask for help with looking after the children. She was applying for jobs here and there, but nothing came through for her. She had been out of the teaching game for too long, so schools were hesitant to accept her application. The only way she could get a job was by having connections with people at a school. It was hard. She didn’t have any connections. She hardly saw Zulfa. And when she did, she omitted many details of her life during their conversations.

Just as Ghafsa was about to continue reading, she heard the front gate open. “Mommy’s favourite child is home!” Fatima shouted from the bottom of the pathway. “Fatima, jy’s vroeeg by die huis,” Ghafsa finally closed her novel as she welcomed her daughter. The tan colour drained from Fatima’s face when she realised that she had come home too early. “Het jy alweer nie campus toe gegaan nie?” Ghafsa started ranting. “Come here, let me see your

eyes,” she demanded. Fatima walked closer to Ghafsa and stared into her mother’s eyes.

BAH! A loud bang of Ghafsa’s clog hit Fatima’s shoulder as she realised that her daughter was once again under the influence of “Allah weet alleen,” as Ghafsa would say.

“Agh!” Ghafsa checked her wristwatch and saw that it was already 15:00. “I will deal with you later Fatima! Ayesha and Zainab, go over to Boeta Kaatjie’s house and go play there a bietjie kanala. Fatima, jy kan na jou kamer toe gaan en hou net jou mond. Mr. De Wet said he will be here around three to come do an inspection,” she told her daughters.

Mr. De Wet was her landlord. The house in Ottery was small, with only two bedrooms, so he was under the impression that it was only Ghafsa, Aziz, and their one daughter who stayed in the house. Each time that Mr. De Wet would come do an inspection and collect the rent, Ayesha and Zainab would have to leave the house until he left. Ghafsa ran around the house picking up every little thing that signalled more than three people lived in the house. After she tidied up, she walked over to the safe that was in her cupboard to fetch the money for the rent that Aziz had left her the last time that he was there. She punched the pin code in and opened the door of the safe. Her eyes scanned the little box, passing her children’s birth certificates, her teaching certificate and some other SARS documents. But there was no sign of any money. “Daai vark nè,” she blurted out under her breath, making sure not to swear in front of her children. She always told herself that she would never swear. They already heard too many vile words when their father showed up. As she closed the door of the safe, she heard a knock.

“Mr. De Wet, how are you? Please come in,” she opened the door and greeted her landlord.

“Ghafsa, it’s good to see you. Is your husband home? I haven’t seen him in a while,” the

white man said. Ghafsa smiled, “Agh, you know him. He works away a lot these days.” Ghafsa felt vulnerable, as if her home was going to be taken away from her. She thought about all the lies that she could tell to explain why she could not pay her rent this month without this man chasing her out of the house. But all that came out of her mouth was, “Uh, Mr. De Wet. To be honest with you, I haven’t seen my husband in more than a month. He usually leaves money here for the rent but I checked the safe today and he left nothing. I know you probably think I am lying or something, but I promise you if you can just give me a few days, I will get hold of him and pay the rent,” Ghafsa babbled.

She always hated lies. She lived by the rule of being honest or omitting things. But never to lie. This was the first time that Ghafsa opened up to somebody about her situation. Albeit a stranger, she still felt a sense of relief. This is what it feels like to let go of your stubbornness and ask for help, she thought. Mr. De Wet had an awkward expression on his face. “Ghafsa, Ghafsa, relax. I know you long enough to know that you wouldn’t lie about something like this. So, Aziz is back to his old ways you say. If only gambling wasn’t forbidden to you. Maybe you could have won a year’s worth of rent at the slots,” he joked, trying his best to lift the awkwardness that weighed heavily on his shoulders. Ghafsa deeply exhaled her pent-up breath and followed it by hugging Mr. De Wet, who again, felt a strong sense of awkwardness.

Later that evening, just before the sun set, Ghafsa took her red bankie and sat on the black cobbled stoep. Fatima was in the garden behind the trees, smoking one of Ghafsa’s Stuyvesants that she stole earlier that day. Ghafsa pretended not to see this. The only light that shone in the garden came from the tall metal streetlamp that stood crookedly on the pavement. The light sometimes flickered, and each time that it did, Fatima would dak down,

in case her mommy could see her take a puff of the cigarette. Ghafsa tried calling Aziz again, but his phone was turned off. She thought about calling one of her sisters, and explaining to them that she needed help paying her rent. But she thought about the embarrassment that she would feel. She was too stubborn to ask for help. Her entire family despised Aziz, and they always encouraged her to leave him. But she stayed. And although she knew that they would help her, with no questions asked, she still did not want to face that embarrassment. So, she called Zulfa.

“Zulfa, salaam. Wat doen jy nou?” she asked once Zulfa answered the call. “Hoe mean jy? It’s almost nine o’clock, I’m busy getting into bed,” Zulfa responded. “Haai, moenie boring wees nie. Come fetch me quickly man, I need you,” Ghafsa attempted. Zulfa sighed over the phone, “Ghafsa. Gaan slaap. I will come pop in by you tomorrow.” Ghafsa’s voice got sterner, “You know I wouldn’t do this unless it was an emergency. Kanala Zulfa,” she pleaded. After a few minutes of going up and down on the phone, Zulfa finally agreed once Ghafsa mentioned that Aziz hasn’t been home in about a month. Ghafsa called Fatima from under the tree and told her to look after her sisters. “Fatima, kanala. Don’t leave the house until I come back, and if your father comes, then call me immediately,” she instructed.

Zulfa pulled up in her Uno and switched off the car. “Sê my net, we not going to kill Aziz nuh? Ghafsa jy weet my man kan nie sonder my survive nie. I can’t go to jail now,” Zulfa joked. Ghafsa smiled, and got in the car. “Aziz hasn’t been home in a month. My landlord came to collect the rent by me today and I have fokol. I know you will help me Zulfa. I know you will pay my rent. But I don’t want that. I need you to drive me to GrandWest,” Ghafsa said as she covered her face. “Is jy mal in jou kop? I will drive to the bank and draw you

money for the rent. You can pay me back whenever so that you don't feel like I'm doing you favours. Jy is mos so harregat om daai te doen," Zulfa responded.

As she started the car, Ghafsa asked Zulfa, "Hoe het jy dit gedoen, al die jare? How can this Uno still be perfect enough to take us places. You know not once did I hear something is broken in your car. And you have it now how long?" Ghafsa changed the subject. "Meer as tien jare oud is die kar. You know, when you look after things it last long. And even when something small breaks, you immediately fix it. Voor alles verkeerd gaan," Zulfa responded. Ghafsa smiled. "If I fixed the problems in my marriage when it started already, maybe it wouldn't be dying out now. I need this Zulfa. I need to go to GrandWest. Trust me kanala. It is my only way out right now," Ghafsa pleaded for the last time.

Fifteen minutes later, the car stopped. "Kom. Haal jou doek af, laat ons 'n bietjie games gaan speel," Zulfa excitedly told Ghafsa, hoping it would cheer her up. Ghafsa looked up through the windscreen and saw the big "GrandWest Casino" sign. "Jy het my rereg gebring!" Ghafsa screamed as she got out of the car and took her scarf off, wrapping it instead around her neck, simultaneously smoothing her hair.

The two women entered the casino for the first time in their lives and the automatic doors swished open. Their eyes were baffled by the brightness on display. The mirrored ceiling of the casino reflected the colourful cartoons that played on the screens of the slot machines. As they walked, the stench of cigarette smoke and alcohol reached their nostrils. Ghafsa's eyes lit up, while Zulfa still felt uneasy. "Relax man!" Ghafsa shouted, but Zulfa couldn't hear her through the clinking of coins falling in the machines.

Ghafsa went to the help desk and exchanged a R20 for a casino card, “Just put this into the machine, then put your money in, then press the button,” the lady at the help desk counter told her. Zulfa was silent, the only gesture she made to Ghafsa was shaking her head in disappointment. Ghafsa sat down in front of one of the ten cents machines that displayed a puzzle of Chinese animated women. Before she put a R50 in, Zulfa tapped her on the shoulder and spoke in her ear. “Ghafsa. I don’t know what is happening, but if you need money, ek kan vir jou help. Hou op om so harregat te wees,” she told her friend. Ghafsa smiled at the kind gesture, then continued slipping her R50 note in. Zulfa lit a cigarette and stood behind Ghafsa, watching in anticipation each time Ghafsa would press the “bet one” button. Her R50 soon came down to R40, then R30, and finally, when it reached R20, Ghafsa pressed the “Cash out” button and removed her card. “Is jy klaar nou?” Zulfa asked. “Ja man, kom ons gaan huis toe,” Ghafsa finally agreed in disappointment.

As they were walking to the help desk, Ghafsa saw an open chair at a classic Lucky Seven machine. “Wag gou. Laat ek net die R20 uitspeel,” she told Zulfa. Ghafsa slid her card in and pressed, “Max bet.” She stared at the screen, and in her head, she said “Bismillah,” unsure if appealing to God would work, considering the context. The first column on the screen stopped on a seven. Ghafsa grabbed onto Zulfa’s hand. Zulfa was now also fascinated, waiting for the second column to stop. Another seven. The two women were now holding each other’s arms and clenching their fists. Another seven! The machine started making a loud ringing noise and the screen was covered in a big “R4000.” Ghafsa and Zulfa both jumped up and started shouting.

Ghafsa arrived home from the casino with a R4000 in cash, and immediately put it into the safe. Her guilt had not yet set in. But it did when she woke up the next morning. Ghafsa left

Mr. De Wet a voicemail, saying that she had the money for the rent, and that he should come and fetch it. When she put the phone down, she walked to the bathroom and took wudhu. As she dried her face, she kept repeating the word, “Astaghfirullah” in her head. She proceeded to the lounge and laid down a muslah. Ghafsa spent an hour on the muslah, begging for forgiveness for the sin that she had just committed. Her tears did not stop. She knew Allah is Ar Rahman, but that did not settle her guilt. As she rubbed her hands over her face and kissed them, she picked the muslah up and heard a knock on the door. She looked through the lounge window and saw that it was Mr. De Wet. She quickly ran to the safe and took the money out. “Mr. De Wet!” she opened the door smiling. “This is for this month and next month, and a bit extra for your patience,” she told him as she handed him the brown envelope. Giving away all her winnings.

About a week later Zulfa called her. “Ghafsa! Ek het baie goeie nuus vir jou,” she said as Ghafsa answered the call. “Salaam to you too Zulfa!” she responded. Zulfa told Ghafsa on the phone, that one of her friends said that they had a job opening at Groenvlei High School, and Zulfa recommended Ghafsa for the job. “Maar Zulfa, what if Aziz finds out?” Ghafsa asked nervously. “To hell with him! Take the job, get your life lekker sorted, and leave the vark,” Zulfa encouraged. Ghafsa smiled, “Ok. When do I start?”

2003

I want to stand on top of Table Mountain and jump off. But I can't. Who will protect my girls? Besides that, I'll jump off of the mountain straight into Jahannam. It's exhausting being this harregat. I am living in chains. I smoke at least three packets of cigarettes a day now. I am alone at home. And when he is at home, I am treated like a varkie. While he is always by that other nasaara meid with the red nails treating her like a princess. I can't jump off of Table Mountain. And I can't be patient anymore. I don't think Allah needs me to be patient anymore. So, I am going to do it. I am going to leave. And I am going to build my own fairytale. One that revolves around me, and not in the shadow of a man.

“Sheikh, it has been years now. This man beat me, he left me alone, he stopped nafaqahing me so long ago. I work alone for my three children. He cheated on me so many times.

Kanala, Sheikh. Allah is my witness, hy doen nie sy job as my man nie. Ek kan nie dit meer vat nie. Hy kom huis toe een keer a maand, en dan het hy nog die audacity om voor my kinders vir my te abuse. I asked him to give me a talaq so many times, and he doesn't want to. I tried hard to make it work. But it doesn't work. I need a fasakh sheikh, for the safety of me and my children. You can go to any police station and see all the times I complained about him abusing me, even check the MJC records and see that he didn't once pitch up for the meetings and counselling that the other Imams suggested,” Ghafsa said to Imam Solomons when she sat in the room at the MJC.

She was right. She tried making things work with him because he refused to give her a talaq. But it wasn't working. As soon as Aziz found out that Ghafsa got a job, he stopped giving any money to the house or the kids. She went back and forth to the MJC requesting a fasakh, and each time they told her she must try to reconcile. Aziz came home once every few months. Her children were aware that he was not a good man. Each time he came, he would

force himself on top of her and have sex with her. There was nothing that she could do except attempt to fight him off. She never won. This was the first time that she met with Imam Solomons. So, she tried to explain every detail.

Ghafsa looked up and saw that Imam Solomons was wiping tears away from his cheeks.

“Ghafsa. Ek is so jammer, dat niemand het vir jou gehelp het nie. I can almost guarantee you that you have a big house waiting for you in Jannah. Allah sê in die Quran, “فَتَأْتِيَنَّكَ مِنَ الْغُرُفِ بُرُجٌ رُءُوسُهَا فِي سَمَاءِ دُجَاهِ” and do you know what that means? With every difficulty there is relief. Allah tests the ones He wants to attain Jannah. Jy is 'n baie sterk vrou. Ek sal vir jou die fasakh gee, inshaAllah. From here you will only know relief.”

Ghafsa burst into tears. She didn't think of her past or her future. She sat in the present moment and cried until her eyes became like barren clouds with no more tears to weep. Her entire life flashed before her eyes. From the moment that she walked out of Primroses Rugby Club and bumped into Aziz, until the last time he came to the house and pressed her shoulders against the bed and got on top of her. She was finally going to be free. She remembered walking out of her parents' house in Athlone on her wedding day, excited to be free, only to live a life full of restraint and abuse. Then she realised, and truly felt it in her heart. The only one who was ever able to give her freedom was her Creator. “Shukran, Sheikh. May Allah ease things for you, as you have eased things for me.”

When Ghafsa left the MJC, the first place she went to, was her mother, who was still staying with Salwa. On her way there, she called each one of her five sisters and told them to meet her at Salwa's house. When she arrived there, Rhoda was in bed. She had been released from the hospital a few days ago after she was recovering from her third heart attack in the month.

The doctors told them that Rhoda was weak and frail. It was a miracle that she was still alive. She was a fighter, they said.

“Salaam Mammie, hoe voel Mammie nou?” Ghafsa asked Rhoda as she sat down on the bed next to her. “Ek voel met my hande. Hoe moet ek dan voel?” Rhoda snarked. Ghafsa laughed, and her sisters all walked in. “My susters. Mammie. Dankie, vir al wat julle vir my gedoen het. I don’t want to hear I told you so, or anything like that. But Alhamdulillah, today I spoke to Sheikh Imtiyaz Solomon and he granted me a fasakh,” she said smiling. Her sisters all gathered around her once again, the same way that they gathered around her the moment that she was born and embraced her in tears and smiles. When they were finished, they all turned to Rhoda, who was also shockingly, in tears. “Ghafsa. Allah gee die moeilikste gevegte aan Sy sterkste soldate. Alhamdullillah, nou kan ek maar dood gaan.” The sisters all sat on the bed surrounding their mother and laughed, all while still crying.



2010

Ghafsa drove home in her red Renault Megane, for the last time as a mere teacher from Groenvlei High School and pulled into her driveway that was situated next to the rectangular patch of grass on her property in Ottery. For the past seven years, she has dedicated her entire life to the children at the school. It brought her deep elation to know that she was a driving force behind so many children's futures. Just last week, she was offered the role of the head of the Afrikaans department from grades eight to twelve. Her salary was about to be bigger, but her heart was happier. She felt appreciated somewhere. She felt a sense of purpose. Everything felt peaceful, and she knew it will feel even better once the wedding was over.

She had one more day left until she would throw her first wedding. Fatima was getting married. And although Ghafsa was at first a bit wary about the boy that Fatima brought home, after spending many days and nights with him, she finally approved of them getting married. Fatima thought that Ghafsa actually started liking her boyfriend. But Ghafsa knew the only reason she was approving was because the condition of getting married was that they stay by her. Where she could keep a close eye on his suspicious ways. Fatima accepted this. She didn't want her mommy to end up alone. She was the eldest child. So, she knew she had to stay by her mommy.

“Kom Fatima! We must go to your final dress fitting soon. Maak seker jy het 'n skoon panty aan,” Ghafsa joked. “Then I must wear the panties mommy bought me for my trousseau!” Fatima called back. Ayesha and Zainab were laughing in the background when Ghafsa started skelling them. “Moenie so lag nie! Did you go make sure all the weeds are pulled out of the pathway yet? When the people come here tomorrow, they must see my house as perfect,” Ghafsa remarked with pride.

Two years into Ghafsa's job at Groenvlei, she was able to qualify for a bond, so Mr De Wet agreed to sell the house to her. Aziz didn't come back. He was called into the MJC on a final warning, and he didn't pitch. So, she was granted her fasakh. He came to her that same day, and she told him, in front of her children, to never come back. And the few times that he tried coming back, Ghafsa called the police to remove him. He eventually stopped trying.

Alhamdulillah.

Ghafsa and Fatima drove all the way down Racecourse Road, passing Oaklands High School, then Kenilworth Centre, and finally entered Claremont Main Road. "Which road must I turn down now again?" Fatima asked. "Huh uh, don't ask me. Jy wil mos my kar ry, now you check yourself," Ghafsa stubbornly responded. Fatima eventually found the road and pulled next to an open parking bay. She put the hazards on and looked at her mother. "Mommy knows I can't parallel park man," she said smiling. "Jirre die kind nè, klim net uit. Laat ek jou wys hoe 'n regte driver ry," Ghafsa said. The two exchanged seats and Ghafsa smoothly pulled into the parallel parking. She made sure to look at all three of her mirrors to not make a mistake. "Kom. Laat ons nou gaan."

When Ghafsa and Fatima reached the small office space that Afzal Moffie used as his dressmaking shop, they knocked on the door. "Hi salaam julle!" he greeted them with a kiss on each of their cheeks. Ghafsa and Fatima looked at each other and smirked. He showed Fatima the way behind the curtain and handed over to her the off-white mermaid dress that she would wear to her reception the next day. "Fatima open the curtain let me come help you," Ghafsa called out. "Nee meisie, the mother must see the final product once it's on!" Afzal replied. When Fatima finally had her dress on, she walked out from behind the curtain

and smiled at Ghafsa. “Ja Allah. Maar jy is mos ’n mooi meisie. Ek kan sien jy is jou ma se dogter,” Ghafsa joked.

The pair arrived back home at the driveway. Before Fatima got out of the car, she said to her mother, “Shukran Mommy. I don’t think I’ll have time alone with Mommy until after the wedding again since the aunties are all here. Shukran for everything you did for us. Shukran for being strong, and for giving us a good life no matter what you went through. We saw all of it. I saw ALL of it. But mostly, shukran for leaving Daddy. This past few years without him I finally saw how it looks to have a happy mommy. Shukran,” Fatima hugged Ghafsa. Ghafsa smiled at Fatima. In an attempt to break the awkward moment, Ghafsa blurted out, “What do you want from me huh? My house or my car?”

Fatima got out of the car and went inside the house, but Ghafsa stayed in the car. Her eyes scanned the interior of her car then made their way outside. She realised that she was sitting in her own car, in the driveway of basically her own house and remembered the time she first saw the driveway and imagined her car to be in that exact place one day.

She smiled and whispered, “They all said I must stop being so harreḡat. But I did this. Alone. Only with Allah’s help. Alhamdulillah.”

As I locked my phone and gently closed my notebook, me and Ma Ghafsa sat in silence. Our eyes met and her thin lips curled into a smile. I turned the pages of my school assignment, an oral history of my family’s history, and reflected on Ma Ghafsa’s unbeatable resilience. This made me think of my own mommy, and how hard it must have been for her to grow up without a stable two-parent home. It wasn’t easy getting Ma Ghafsa to step back into the past

and tell this story. But now as I look at her, she seems content. As if her story needed to be told, and maybe I was the first person to listen. With a new appreciation of my grandma's past, I will now wait for the day when my mommy tells me her story. The journey of unwritten chapters has just begun, and the narrator, it seemed, was me all along.





Harreġat

A Reflective essay by Quanita Ajouhaar

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

In the heart of the Cape Malay community, where identity is often a fraught ground, *Harreġat* emerges as a powerful and unapologetic narrative. It defies convention, challenging the stereotype of the submissive Muslim woman. Instead, it portrays the protagonist, Ghafsa, as harregat – stubborn and resilient, using a language deeply rooted in her community’s culture. This novella is not written for outsiders but for those who share her experiences, speaking to them in a language that is their own. *Harreġat* is a bold experiment, an introspective work that refuses to explain itself to the world, instead inviting its readers to grow from within the reading. It is a testament to the strength and complexity of Cape Malay women, and a celebration of their voices.

During my years of studying creative writing, first at the Honour’s level and then the first year of my structured Master’s degree, I noticed a relative lack of fiction featuring the community from which I come. I was born and raised in a closely connected community in Cape Town, whose culture most often is referred to as “Cape Malay” culture.¹ The term “Malay” has been used in several ways over time, and its meaning is contested within the Cape Malay community itself. Some Cape Malays have embraced the term as a marker of their unique cultural identity, while others reject it as a relic of colonialism and apartheid and prefer to identify simply as South African or Muslim. However, over time, the term “Cape Malay” has been used to refer specifically to the descendants of slaves at the Cape who practise Islam and speak a Creole language known as Afrikaans, or, more specifically, as it has been identified more recently, Afrikaaps (Jeppie 87). But Afrikaaps also influences the English spoken at the Cape, which comes across in my novella. This English has been colloquially referred to as Afrikaapse Engels.

When I reflected on my previous writing, I realised that I have almost automatically tended to write about my community for an outside readership. I have not done so in very obvious ways, where I, for example, use local terms and dialect, that I then explain to the outsider through a glossary. But I have done so in indirect ways where, for example, I focus on the experience of apartheid on someone of my background, for someone who did not have that experience. This comes through very clearly in one of my previous short stories “The Roadtrip,” where apartheid racial signs become a major focus of the narrative. For example,

¹ The term “Cape Malay” originated during the colonial era when the Dutch East India Company brought slaves from various parts of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to work in the Cape Colony. The term is considered problematic by some people because it is seen as a racial and ethnic stereotype that does not accurately represent the diverse histories and cultural backgrounds of people in the Western Cape region.

the narrator going to a holiday camp observes: “We drove for hours, passing signs of ‘Whites Only’ and at the bottom of it always said ‘Net Blankes.’” And then to emphasise even further: “We arrived at Happy Valley and entered the path that said, “NET NIE-BLANKES” (non-whites only).” I see that I even translated the Afrikaans to make my narrative understandable to someone outside of an Afrikaans-speaking community, i.e. for a dominant English readership. I also realised that the type of narrative voice I used was a voice that used “standard” language, within which only my dialogue showcased the ways of speaking of my community.

I therefore wrote *Harreċat* as an experiment, not for an outside readership, but for a reader who is in my community and does not need to have an “interpreter” for the narrative. This is the challenge I had set for myself. When discussing this idea, I discovered that there was a term for the kind of writing I had been doing. “Extroverted” literature is a term used by African literary scholar, Eileen Julien, to refer to the variety of African writing that is globally recognised, as it tends to convey its “Africanness” through its physical setting or anthropologically describing African experiences to gain the understanding of an outside readership for the local community (Julien 681). I thought then, perhaps I could write an introverted novel, where it would wholly be for an inside readership. I would regard this as an experiment, where I would use the language of the Cape Malay community raw, with no glossary or built-in translations or explanations for the outside reader. The language was one of the main features that would make my novella an introverted novel. I knew that I wanted the focus of the novella to be a Cape Malay woman, especially being centered around the various issues that these women face in their community. I decided that I would like to write a novella for the Cape Malay woman, and perhaps also the Cape Malay man who is open to a challenge. I tried to write a novella that would entertain, lighten the daily load of, and provoke the reader to reflect on the characters and the setting that are their own.

Harreċat may also be seen as a type of “street literature” as has been studied by Laajala et al. African street literature refers to a genre of literature that is popularly read and sold on the streets in many African countries. It is usually written in local languages and is often characterised by its address of immediate social and political issues in an accessible language (Laajala et al 13). This genre of literature has gained popularity in many African countries due to its affordability, accessibility, and relatable content (Laajala et al 13). The researchers suggest that this literature may be side-stepping Julien’s “extroverted” literature by targeting locals rather than targeting a worldwide readership. In contrast to an “extroverted” African novel that is intended to allow a global readership to understand it,

Laajala describes “street literature” as, “writing that emerges from and registers the ebbs and flows of everyday life in spaces where ‘ordinary’ people from different communities and walks of life interact and where the local, the regional and the global intersect in complex ways” (Laajala et al 13). *Harreċat* can therefore be considered a kind of “Cape Town” street literature, as it portrays a local community through the use of an “introverted” narrative intended to be read by that community.

In my previous writing I have mainly written about the experience of my community for outsiders, especially the particular experience of apartheid. In this novella, I write about the concerns of people like my central character and the communities from which they come. There are many tensions in these communities about proper conduct, especially for women. In some Cape Malay communities, divorced women may face societal censure, financial instability, and social acceptance challenges. The ease with which men can obtain a divorce compared to women in Islam leads to a stigma that often portrays women as the problem in a marriage. Additionally, the judgment and stigma faced by divorced women may be influenced by traditional gender norms in Islamic teachings, which place a responsibility on men to provide for women. Despite Islamic teachings that emphasise the importance of marrying widows or divorcees as a *sunna*², the community may still impose harsh judgments and stigma on women who have gone through a divorce. This set of circumstances is reflected in the attitude of Ghafsa, my central character, who resists divorce for precisely the reasons outlined here.

Conversely, some women hold the belief that they do not wish to enter a remarriage and instead choose to become the primary breadwinner while raising their children independently, like the main character in *Harreċat*. However, this decision often produces societal stigma, as it goes against the Islamic teaching that men are responsible for women. The community tends to disregard the reasons behind the woman's initial divorce or widowhood. For example, Ghafsa, who suffered abuse and infidelity from her husband, has accumulated trauma from her marriage and feels a need to protect her daughters. As a result, she lacks the inclination to remarry. The romance that she tasted in courtship, and had hoped would bloom in marriage, declines rapidly so that the novella becomes a kind of ‘anti-romance.’

² In Islam, Sunna refers to the practices and sayings of Prophet Muhammad, constituting a vital source of guidance alongside the Quran. It encompasses his actions (Filiya) and sayings (Qawliya) and serves as a model for Muslims to follow in their daily lives.

In her chapter titled “The Allure of Romance from Harlequins to Margaret Atwood,” Morrison presents the notion that the evolution of romance novels has shifted towards narratives featuring heroines invested in heightened social consciousness (Morrison 8). This emergent trend can be understood as a literary progression that deviates from conventional romantic paradigms. The concept of an “anti-romance” emerges, indicating a narrative perspective that opposes the typical romantic pattern where the all-powerful influence of true love prevails to hide what the heroine might have to accept. In this analytical context, my novella, *Harreċat*, stands as a prime example of the anti-romance genre. The plot in *Harreċat* moves forward because the main character, Ghafsa, strongly desires a romantic ideal similar to fairytales. However, the ending she experiences is very different from the expected romantic outcome. Instead of following the usual ending where true love triumphs, Ghafsa gains her freedom and releases herself from the constraints of romantic involvement. This significant shift in the story's direction confirms that *Harreċat* can be labelled as an anti-romance narrative since the abuse of women is an unromantic story. In her study titled, “Coloured women leaving abusive spousal relationships: a phenomenological study,” Feroza Hamida Mohamed suggests that coloured women are more susceptible to experiencing domestic abuse and more unlikely to leave the relationship. The process encompasses two distinct phases as described by Mohammed. In the initial phase, women confront confusion and attempt to terminate abusive situations, but frequently find themselves paralysed. Subsequently, during the second phase, they undergo an internal struggle, gradually embracing their authentic selves by acknowledging their thoughts and emotions, despite initial reservations about challenging their predefined roles (Mohamed 125). In my novella, the character Ghafsa undergoes a parallel journey, enduring years of abuse before summoning the courage to disrupt her prescribed role as a wife. Mohammed's research lends credibility to Ghafsa's fictional experience by drawing from real-life case studies, thereby authenticating her narrative. Ultimately, Ghafsa's struggle with an abusive relationship serves to underscore the concept of an "anti-romance" story.

Dominant stereotypical and Islamophobic portrayals of Muslim women generally present Muslim women as passive and submissive (Janson 185). These stereotypes often associate Muslim women with the hijab, as Janson notes. However, in reality, the choice to wear hijab is not an indicator of a woman's submissiveness, but rather, an expression of her faith and identity. The main character in my novella, Ghafsa, seems to confirm this stereotype. Early on in her marriage, romance changes to neglect and abuse, but she perseveres within the marriage, hiding her experience from her daughters, her family and the

community. It appears as though Ghafsa is the embodiment of the image of the submissive Muslim woman who suffers under patriarchal control and violence. But my novella tries ironically to undermine this stereotype since Ghafsa is not submissive, in fact, she is *Harreċat* – hard-arsed. She refuses to give her husband the satisfaction of divorcing him, forcing him partially to maintain herself and her children as is his obligation. The title itself, *Harreċat*, meaning, stubborn, is embodied in Ghafsa’s character. Combining stubbornness and the Islamic concept of "sabr" (patience coming from faith), Ghafsa's character emerges as both defiant of familial wishes, and deeply rooted in her faith. Her initial determination to marry Aziz, despite her parents' reservations, also highlights her stubbornness, which gets underlined throughout her marriage. What looks like the submission of the passive Muslim woman is shown in the novella to be her strength, and challenge that her husband take responsibility for their family. Because she is *Harreċat*, Ghafsa triumphs at the end of this anti-romance. But Ghafsa's tenacity is not solely driven by determination, but also encompasses qualities of patience and resilience. This recognition served as a catalyst for me to incorporate more of Ghafsa's intricate thoughts within the narrative framework. In the novella, I employed the element of time as a narrative tool, carefully weaving flashbacks and forward jumps to engage readers and build suspense. This departure from the typical “biography” format of my novella, also allowed the intricacy of Ghafsa’s subjectivity to emerge through her introspection. The issues explored through the narrative, and especially through Ghafsa’s introspection, weigh up the possibilities for the Muslim woman in an Islamic context and through Islamic frames of reference. The introverted narrative tries to avoid an “anthropological” approach where it explains the “woman question” in Islam. Instead, it writes for women like Ghafsa, or men who are interested, about the experience of being in an abusive relationship, and the rationale for why this character acts as she does. The narrative is written to highlight the wit and wisdom of the main character and her community so that the novella also is entertaining and enlightening. In writing my novella, I projected forward to it being sold not, for example, at Exclusive Books in Cavendish Square, but in the same places where my characters live. It could be in local fast-food establishments where a big part of the Coloured or Cape Malay community regularly goes to buy food. Or at the local faith-based stores like The Deen Store, or expos such as a Ramadaan or Eid expo.

The use of an introverted narrative in the novella brought forth its own set of challenges and limitations. One key challenge was the need to create an authentic and original voice that accurately represented the way Cape Malay women speak. Since the novella spans different time periods, it was important to capture how language evolved

among different generations. The older characters, like Rhoda, tended to use more Afrikaaps, while younger characters like Ghafsa, used a combination of Afrikaaps and Kaapse Engels. And finally, Ghafsa's granddaughter, who we discover at the end, is the frame narrator all along, uses Kaapse Engels. However, I faced a significant hurdle because I did not belong to either of these older generational groups. The closest that I am to these groups is the granddaughter. Therefore, to accurately depict the voices of these characters, I had to conduct thorough research and have numerous conversations with individuals from these demographics. This is why I considered the novella an experiment in introverted storytelling. There is not a lot of fictional literature written in this specific voice, and I wanted to provide a narrative that would resonate with my target readership, hence the choice of an introverted narrative approach.

Choosing to write my novella exclusively for the Cape Malay community has its disadvantages. The use of the specific language in *Harreċat*, might be tricky for those not familiar with its terms. This could create a language barrier, making it harder for a wider audience to connect with the novella. It might seem like I am alienating others who could be interested. Still, I decided to go ahead and write it nonetheless. *Harreċat* represents overcoming difficulties. The main character, Ghafsa, faces challenges but succeeds against all odds. Similarly, my novella, even if not everyone can relate to it, will find interest within the Cape Malay community. *Harreċat* puts the Cape Malay community in the world of street literature. Just as Ghafsa confidently enters the story, my novella, with its unique language, asserts the presence of the Cape Malay community in the South African literary context - unapologetically.

The relationship between dialogue and framing narration was where the real challenge of "introversion" lay. I will discuss dialogue first and then the frame narration. The dialogue incorporates a combination of English, Afrikaans, and Malay words, known as Afrikaaps. Afrikaaps is a linguistic system with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, and has historically been used by marginalised communities in the Western Cape as a form of resistance against linguistic oppression (Hendricks 7). Hendricks argues that "Kaaps has played a significant role in the identity formation and social cohesion of a marginalised people" (Hendricks 9). Quentin Williams complements this theory, as he explains that the use of Afrikaaps in literature can also be seen as a form of resistance against linguistic oppression, particularly in the context of South Africa's history of apartheid (Williams 107). Therefore, the use of Afrikaaps dialogue in the novella served as a powerful tool for both cultural representation and resistance against linguistic oppression, particularly for the Cape

Malay community, to which the protagonist, Ghafsa, belongs. Ghafsa embodies this element of resistance through her language, which stems from Afrikaaps, but later is remixed into a type of Afrikaapse Engels. Although there is no scholarly work published on Afrikaapse Engels the term seems fitting to Ghafsa's use of language in *Harreċat*. Although Ghafsa's language of enculturation is Afrikaaps, the difference between the formal English educational opportunities for Ghafsa compared with her parents' generation, and her exposure to more globalised media in English, mean that she gradually begins to speak more English than her parents. I am referring to this type of English as Afrikaapse Engels since it still bears traces of Afrikaaps. Afrikaapse Engels is therefore clearly depicted in the narrator, Ghafsa's granddaughter's voice, which is the framing narrative of the novella. The granddaughter, who is of the same generation that I am, uses a fairly standard English quite confidently, but the Afrikaaps still filters through in diction and expression. The title of my novella, with the one letter in Arabic, also serves as a reminder of the origins of Afrikaans and Afrikaaps in the language of slaves at the Cape, and the first Afrikaans written in Arabic script (Davids).³

The biggest challenge in writing my novella was the way I approached the interaction between dialogue and the framing narrative within which the dialogue is embedded. I had no problem writing a variety of English mixed with the Afrikaaps of the protagonist, and some of the other characters. I would like to think that I am well versed in Afrikaaps, due to my cultural heritage, everyday usage, and socialisation. The omniscient narration was also written using English influenced by Afrikaaps, or as I have referred to it "Afrikaapse Engels." This means that the entire narrative has been written using local dialects of languages, without defaulting to the "standard" English of a national or international audience. I was challenged to maintain consistency in tone, style, and language throughout the omniscient narration and the dialogue. This allowed me to create a cohesive and unified narrative structure that stuck to the holistic use of Afrikaaps and "Afrikaapse Engels."

Given the length and time constraints of the Masters mini-thesis, I decided to write a novella, rather than a novel. I opted for the novella form, rather than the short story cycle since the novella has a more focused narrative structure, which allows a focus on one protagonist's life, which was crucial to writing the life and subjectivity mainly of Ghafsa. Florian Fuchs writes, "[n]ovellas lack subplots and contain only one major storyline that

³ The idea of including an Arabic letter in the title was inspired by Abdul Waghied Misbach's dissertation. Misbach used the Arabic letter to symbolise his claim in creating an inclusive social narrative, simultaneously encouraging people to think differently about history and helps those who were left out by Euro-Western power and culture.

centers around one decisive turning event...or the inexplicable into the characters' everyday" (Fuchs 400). This one major storyline of the novella form allowed for a concise and intimate approach to storytelling, which enabled a deeper exploration of character, theme, and setting. Rather than being a broader "Cape Town narrative," the novella has an "introverted" focus, shedding light on local areas such as Claremont, Athlone, Grassy Park, and Lansdowne, which were/are predominantly Coloured communities. Ghafsa is located in these different areas at various points in the timeline, reflecting the impact of apartheid and the changes she undergoes in her life.

Harreġat overlaps with the approaches of some novels written by local authors, but simultaneously it has distinct differences. *Living Coloured (Because Black and White Were Already Taken)* by Yusuf Daniels is an autobiographical work that recounts the challenges faced by Daniels growing up in Cape Town as a person of mixed-race heritage during apartheid and in post-apartheid South Africa. Daniels also uses Afrikaaps, for example, words like "jarre," (Daniels 45) "kwaai," (Daniels 56), and "yoh." (Daniels 69), but he occasionally addresses readers outside of the community, explaining terms like "Labarang" for "Eid" (Daniels 51). By contrast, in her memoir *Ougat*, Shana Fife reflects on the challenges of growing up as a coloured child in a society divided by racial boundaries. Fife explains the nuances of coloured culture to readers outside the community and includes a glossary defining non-standard English terms, unlike Daniels, who does not include a glossary but rather explains some but not all words. Fife also employs colloquial phrases and blends English and Afrikaans, such as the title of the memoir, *Ougat*, which means to be precocious. Although this mix of languages leans toward introversion, the fact that Fife explains everything to an outside reader makes it clear that the narrative actually is written for an outside readership.

I share the focus on Cape Malay female experience with the well-known writer, Rayda Jacobs, especially her enormously successful *Confessions of a Gambler*, which had the rare privilege of being locally, nationally and internationally popular. Gambling is of specific interest to a Muslim audience since the gambling issue is that it is specifically forbidden by Islam. But some Muslims do gamble and then create the concept of "dirty money" which they use for "non-essential" debt, for example, paying fines rather than paying for food for one's family. Jacobs' character, Abeeda, enters into detailed debates about the topic to make her feel less guilty. Abeeda says after winning a large sum of money, "If I win a thousand I'm happy. It means I can come back and play again. I don't want to lose, but I don't want to burn in the jahanam fire either" (Jacobs 51). This statement illustrates the internal struggle that a

Muslim gambler may have. This makes her writing resonate with local readers and create a connection based on shared cultural experiences and perspectives. Similarly, in *Harreċat*, Ghafsa also has experience with gambling. However, her reason for gambling is not for pleasure, but for survival. She uses the money as a means to an end, and symbolically, it is her sin that enlivens her deep-rooted faith in Islam. Her sin of gambling leads her to realise that the man she has married is keeping her away from the only One that matters, Allah.

In a world often dominated by external narratives and misconceptions about Muslim women, my novella stands as a testament to the strength, resilience, and defiance of these women within the Cape Malay community. *Harreċat* is not just a novella; it is a rebellion against the status quo, a tribute to the strength of Muslim women, and a reminder that their voices deserve to be heard and understood. Through an introverted lens, I have written a narrative that explores and challenges these stereotypes, and celebrates their unwavering faith, determination, and strength, which often comes across as submissiveness. Perhaps the final words should be Ghafsa's: "They all said I must stop being so harreċat. But I did this. Alone. Only with Allah's help."

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized classical building with columns and a pediment.

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