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The Wedding Interviews



By Sal Gabier

Part 1. First Impressions



Interview, 16 August 2003, early morning: Omar (*the groom*)

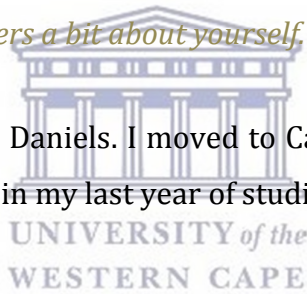
So how does this work?

*It's quite simple really. During these interviews you get to talk about anything you like. I'll ask questions here and there to help the story along. Just be honest and try to forget about the camera. We'll use the interview footage to complement the live footage to help tell your story. **Wedding from Different Worlds** is probably the most honest and authentic documentary series on television. You're pretty lucky to star in one of the episodes. So relax and say anything.*

Anything? So what should I talk about now?

You can start by telling the viewers a bit about yourself.

Ok. Let's see. My name is Omar Daniels. I moved to Canada from Cape Town, South Africa about four years ago. I'm in my last year of studies.



What are you studying?

I'm pursuing my Bachelor's of Applied Science in Computer Engineering. It's a newish program.

Tell me about Soraya.

Soraya is my fiancée. We met at university and we just decided to get married. We're going to get married in May of next year and I guess you're all going to see it.

That's all you can say about her?

Of course not. She's the most amazing girl I've ever met. She's also in her final year and she's studying sociology. She's Egyptian --- actually, she's Canadian but her parents were born in Egypt.

So she's Egyptian-Canadian?

Yes.

And how did you guys meet?

That's a bit of a story. Soraya may get annoyed with me telling it, but it's really pretty funny. I kind of *picked her up*.

Really?

Yeah. I noticed her on campus over the years but we've never spoken or anything. I always saw her from a distance. Last semester though, we both had a class in Dillon Hall. Mine is right after hers so I started seeing her on the third floor on my way to class every time. So in the second week of the semester, I made sure to make eye contact with her and then I just started talking to her in the hallway. I chatted her up and got her phone number.

What did you say?

Don't laugh, but I pretended that she looked familiar and said that I thought we were in Psychology 101 together.

Were you in psychology together?

I never took a psychology course before in my life. But every term there are over a 1000 students who do, so I knew there was a good chance that she took it and wouldn't know everyone in her class. And she actually bought it. This is a pretty

common line at our university and it's almost become a joke. To be honest, I was almost disappointed that she believed me.

But you dated her anyway.

I did. She was cute. But she actually wouldn't date me at that point. She told me that she didn't date for religious reasons but we could get lunch on campus some time.

Aren't you the same religion?

Yeah, but my family is a bit more liberal. I kind of think that her family is in denial about dating. They don't have arranged marriages, which means that they need some other mechanism for people to meet to get married. But *dating* has a stigma for them, so they date but call it something different. They'll say they're 'getting to know each other' or 'chatting'. But really, it's dating.

Do you tell her that?



I usually make fun of her for it. I tell her that she's halaal-macking.

Halaal-macking? I don't understand.

Well, halaal means its *ok* for Muslims. Like *permissible*. Like you get Halaal food, it means no pork or things Muslims can't eat. It's *permissible* to eat it. And macking is like womanizing for guys or chasing guys for girls. So halaal-macking.

That sounds offensive.

It's ok, I'm Muslim.

Interview, 16 August 2003, late morning: Soraya (*the bride*)

What did Omie say?

Omie?

That's my nickname for him. His friends call him Omo.

He just told me a bit about himself. And how you two met.

Ok, so I'll also tell you a bit about myself. My name is Soraya. Besides my family, everyone calls me Ray or Ray Ray. I'm Egyptian-Canadian. I'm 21 and in my fourth year of Sociology. What should I talk about?

Tell us why you're marrying Omar.

There are so many reasons. I know most people my age will just talk about how in love they are, but I'm really not that naïve. The truth is I think we're both really compatible. We have the same life-goals. We're both Muslim.

I'm a bit surprised that you didn't mention love as a reason.

Don't get me wrong, I do have feelings for him, but that's really not the only reason we're getting married. When you study sociology, you learn that those feelings are not enough.

I see. It sounds like you're happy with the relationship and the wedding plans.

Well, the wedding plans are not going perfectly, but the big things are sorted out. We still have about eight months before the wedding.

How long have you been dating?

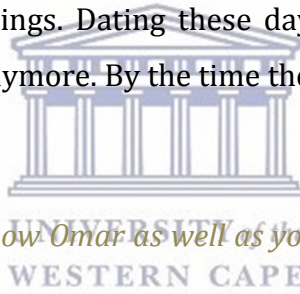
We haven't actually *dated*. I think your viewers probably haven't encountered a relationship like ours. We got to know each other and stuff, but we didn't actually date.

That is quite interesting. Can you explain that?

Sure. We speak a lot on the phone and Omar comes over for dinner almost every night, but we rarely go out alone. When we do we just see a movie or have dinner. It's all very innocent.

That sounds exactly like dating.

Not anymore. Do you know what kids get up to these days? Experimenting on each other and doing all sorts of things. Dating these days is actually pretty intense. I don't think kids are innocent anymore. By the time they get to my age they've seen it all and done it all.



Are you afraid that you don't know Omar as well as you should? Perhaps not as much as other couples who dated.

I know all the important things. Omar is a really good guy. And besides, you really can't know someone until you live with them.

For someone who's never dated, you sound quite wise.

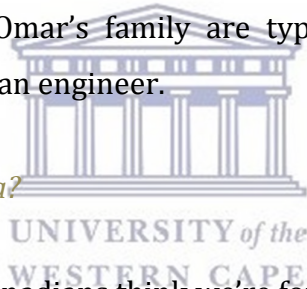
Well, I guess I understand this stuff academically. I'm going to get a crash course in the practical side very soon. Everyone says you can't know someone until you live with them. So Omar and I will learn about each other. It's something every couple experiences. It's a bit scary but I know Omar and we will be very happy together.

*Let's change gears. You were the one who wrote the letter to the producers making the case that you and Omar would be perfect for **Wedding from Different Worlds**. Why is your relationship so special?*

Well, I've been watching this show from the first episode. You guys always pick the oddest couples. I just thought that an Egyptian-Canadian and a South African-Canadian would be so interesting, you know our being hyphenated people and all. You've also never had Canadians on the show nor Muslims. To be honest, I didn't think we'd be selected.

Why's that?

Because the couples on the show are always so exotic. We're pretty ordinary Canadians. I was born here. Omar's family are typical immigrants. They're not refugees or anything. His Dad's an engineer.



So you guys blend well in Canada?

Of course. Maybe some older Canadians think we're foreign.

Older?

You know what I mean.

Not really.

White Canadians.

I see.

But anyway, there's always some kind of conflict on the show because of the culture clash. The mother-in-law fights with the girl and the brothers hate the groom and the bride and groom start to hate each other. But with Omar and me, there isn't any conflict. We all get along, families included.

Your story is interesting enough not to need conflict. Even if Omar's family thinks you're just doing this for your fifteen minutes of fame.

What? Did they say that?

Sorry, forget I said anything.



African boy meets Arabian girl

“Hi there. You know, I always see you in the hallways, but we’ve never actually met. My name is Omar.”

They were walking in opposite directions in the hallway and their eyes met for only the briefest of moments, but Omar had been waiting for this opportunity for months now so he wasn’t going to let the opportunity slide. Omar extends his hand and Soraya reflexively takes it.

“Oh, um, hi.” Soraya is caught off guard. She had seen this boy around campus but for him to stop her and speak to her is quite surprising.

“I’m kinda new here so I don’t know that many people.”

“Really, where’d you move from?”

“South Africa.”

“You’re African? Please.” Soraya is amused that this fair-skinned boy is trying to convince her that he is an African. *Maybe his parents were missionaries or something* she thinks. “So you’re a European but you were born in Africa?”

“Actually, I am technically classified as Malay.”

“Oh, come on. I’d believe you were black before I believed you were Malaysian.” This is the strangest pickup line Soraya has ever heard. She isn’t even sure if it is a pickup attempt. It is very amusing though.

He likes her giggle. “I’m a bit of a mix. I’m African, European, and Malaysian all rolled into one. Where are you from?”

“Born in Canada, but my parents were born in Egypt. Before you ask, I can’t speak Arabic.”

Omar wasn’t going to ask. Instead, he steers the conversation in a new direction. “I think we were in Psychology 1 together last year.”

“Oh, that’s where I know you from.”

He can’t believe it. The line actually worked. He never actually took Psychology 1 but knew it was always over-subscribed and had a thousand plus students. If you are going to fabricate a coincidence, that’s a good bet. He had enough friends in the class to allow him to. *This girl can’t be that bright if she’s falling for this line*, he muses. Somehow, that’s both disappointing and exciting to Omar.

“It’s a pretty boring subject, but Dr Jonson really made the material come alive,” says Omar.

“I know. I heard the people who are taking the night class have to suffer through Dr Lamiere, who is supposed to be pretty boring.”

“So what’s your major?”

“I’m in Sociology. I almost switched to Psychology after that class. I really love Dr Jonson.”

“That’s so weird. I’m also thinking of switching to Psychology. I’m in computer engineering. So are you part of any clubs?”

“I’m part of the Islamic Society. That’s pretty much it. I kind of keep to myself.”

“Me too. Look, I never do this,” Omar says for the thousandth time to the thousandth girl, “but I’ve been noticing you in these hallways for weeks now and I’ve been trying to build up courage to speak to you. Every time I see you smile or I hear you laugh in the hallways, that becomes the best part of my week. Do you think I can buy you coffee sometime? Or maybe dinner?”

Soraya has to smile. She knows that the most common line that guys use is that they were classmates in Psychology 1. *He can’t be too bright to use such a common line*, she thinks but the fact that her smile makes him have a good week is quite flattering. And she has to give him credit for taking the chance to talk to her out of the blue like this. That takes a lot of courage. He’s also very cute.

“Well, my parents are super-overprotective, so I probably can’t see you at night. But maybe we can go off-campus for lunch?”

“Hey, that’s great. There are some nice places here. Do you like Thai?”

“You know, I’ve never actually tried it. But I’ll try anything that doesn’t have nuts in it. I’m allergic to nuts.”

“Oh my God. I’m also allergic to nuts. It’s so difficult to find meals I can eat.”

“Me too. Now I have someone I can eat with.”

Omar makes a mental note not to eat peanuts in front of her. That will be difficult seeing as how peanuts are his favorite snack.

Interview, 16 August 2003, afternoon: Sedick (the groom's father)

I have mixed feelings about this.

*You mean participating in **Wedding from Different Worlds**?*

Yes. It seems very exhibitionist. I don't watch too many of these shows but in the ones that I have, the families don't come off too well.

*Well, that's really up to the families. Remember, **Wedding from Different Worlds** is not a reality show, it's a documentary series. **Wedding from Different Worlds** never manipulates content. **Wedding from Different Worlds** doesn't have an agenda.*

Well, there are still cameras and microphones following my family around.

*But they are instructed to, as far as possible, stay out of the way. **Wedding from Different Worlds** prides itself on its subtlety.*

You're saying *Wedding from Different Worlds* a lot.

Sorry, it's in my contract. I'm supposed to say it as many times as possible.

Anyway, I'm not one hundred percent sure this is a good idea. It's one thing to share your wedding on TV, but sharing the planning of the wedding may not be a good idea.

Why? Aren't weddings joyous occasions that are shared with the entire community?

Weddings, yes. Planning the wedding is completely different. I learned my first lessons about life and marriage from my own wedding planning, and I wouldn't want to learn those lessons in front of millions of people. I'm surprised my wife and I survived it. It was very stressful.

Tell me about your wife. How did you meet?

We met at university. Similar to Omar and Soraya. We were both part of the MSS – the Muslim Students Society. I used to see her at the meetings and started falling in love. We were organizing our annual dinner and we worked so closely together. We've been together ever since.

How long did you date before you got married?

Not long. We wanted to get married immediately. It was a funny time. We were so into the MSS. We were doing so much charity and attending all these religious events. We were on such a spiritual high. So when we met we wanted to do things *the right way*. We felt that dating wasn't the Islamic way to do things so we wanted to get married.

Did you?



Our parents wouldn't let us. Both of our parents thought we were rushing into it. They wanted us to finish university first. They were worried that we wouldn't finish.

Were you rushing because you wanted to have sex?

You're speaking to the wrong generation if you think I'm going to share intimate details of my relationship with you. I think this has been enough for today.

Interview, 16 August 2003, early evening: Gafoor/Gus (*the bride's father*)

Do you prefer Gus or Gafoor?

Let's go with Gus.

It's interesting that you prefer your Canadian-sounding nickname to your proper Arabic name.

I don't. I just don't like hearing my proper name butchered.

I see. My producer told me you were very reluctant to appear on camera, but your wife was much more willing.

My wife is willing because she will do anything for Soraya's happiness. I am more interested in what is best for Soraya.

You're very protective of her.

She's my little girl.

Understood. How did you meet your wife?

I thought this show was about Soraya and Omar.



It is, but the viewers may be interested.

Ok. I was literally the boy next door. Our families knew each other for as long as I can remember. I asked for her hand when we were eighteen. We were married a few months later. That's it.

So you knew her your whole life?

Yes.

When did you know that you wanted to marry her?

I proposed when we were 18.

But when did you know that you were going to propose?

...

Gus?

When I was eight.

That's quite sweet.

Ok, that's enough for today.

Interview, 16 August 2003, late evening: Raania (*the bride's mother*)

I can't believe you got Gafoor to tell that story. Do you know we were married for years before he told me that he knew at eight that he wanted to marry me? He was in love with me since then. Surprising if you look at him now. He's turned into quite a grumpy old bear.

He's quite romantic. It's a bit surprising to me. I just assumed you two were arranged. When did you know that you wanted to marry him?

Hard to say. I used to think of him as just one of the kids in the neighborhood. We all used to play together. When I was about fourteen, I could tell that my parents were keeping an eye on me and were kind of keeping us apart. I think our parents knew at that point that maybe something was going to happen.

You mean your parents were thinking of you and Gafoor getting married?

I think so. I started noticing him at that point. He used to play soccer in the street every day after school. My mom would always send me to the shop to buy bread or

milk or whatever, so I knew when I went to the shop, he'd see me. I started to wear my best clothes and a lot of makeup wishing that he'd notice me. I tried to walk like the models do on the runway. I must have looked ridiculous. My mother yelled at me once "Why are you wearing high heels to go buy Aish Baladi?" Um, Aish Baladi is pita bread. She laughed afterwards once she knew. I guess that's what love does to you.

So Gafoor was your only boyfriend?

Wow. You really butcher his name.

I've been told.

Well, Gafoor and I weren't really boyfriend/girlfriend. We didn't date the way they do here. He and his family proposed, then we got married.

Soraya said she doesn't like the word 'date'. She said there was a stigma attached to it.

A little. Although that is changing quickly. A girl's reputation is very important and if people think that you've been dating everyone, it affects you. It can also embarrass the family. I always tell Soraya that when people talk about you, they don't have your best interests at heart. If people see you walking with a boy, they'll say you were holding hands. If you spend a lot of time with someone, they'll say you're in a secret relationship. And so it goes. I always tell Soraya to be careful.

She seems to have a good reputation.

She's a good girl. I trust her. I still keep an eye on her, though. There are people who like to make trouble. They look for things and if they can't find anything, they'll make something up or exaggerate something. And they won't do it immediately, they'll wait until a boy is interested and then they'll start the rumors.

That sounds pretty conniving. Is that really the norm in your culture?

Please. It's all cultures. We just have a different style.

Interview, 18 August 2003: Mishqah (*the groom's mother*)

So we finally get to talk.

Yes. It's the first time in this booth, but those cameras have been following me for the last two days.

I hope you didn't feel they were too invasive. You'll get used to them. It's best to ignore them.

I don't mind the cameramen. They keep their distance. It's the guys with the microphones on those poles. They're either at my feet or above my head. I feel like the microphones are either going to trip me or fall on my head. But anyway, I suppose that is how it has to be. I understand you've spoken to almost everyone.

Not you.

It's been crazy. We're trying to organize flights for the family and deciding who's going to stay where. I've also been on the phone with different caterers, halls, florists. You name it.

You've become the de facto wedding planner.

I guess I have. It feels a bit weird with cameras and microphones in the house. Do they really need to be at the house every day?

They really do. We want to capture authentic moments. You really can't predict when they happen. Documentaries don't orchestrate any events like a reality show. Reality shows like to stir things up and create conflicts that wouldn't otherwise occur. The whole purpose of a documentary is to get out of the way and document things the way they really are. We simply observe.

Ok. It's all pretty boring, but you can record me making the plans if it makes you happy. So what do you want to know?

What do you think of Soraya?

Soraya? She's a lovely girl. I'm so happy that she's becoming part of the family.

That's wonderful. You and your husband?

Yes. We both love her. She's fitting in quite well.



So she's the kind of girl you've always envisioned for Omar.

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Yes. Well, in most ways. I mean, we didn't envision her for Omar. Not that she's not great. She is. But we didn't exactly think he would marry a girl who was--- or a girl exactly like her. But, I mean, she has great qualities.

Ok.

I'm not explaining myself well. I think Soraya is great. And we couldn't be happier. We just thought he'd settle down with a nice South African Muslim. But Soraya is great.

Are there a lot of South African girls in Windsor?

There are a few families here. We have dinner with the Parkers and Hendrickses almost every week. They have daughters close to Omar's age. They're friends.

And?

Unfortunately, it just didn't happen. *Unfortunately* is the wrong word.

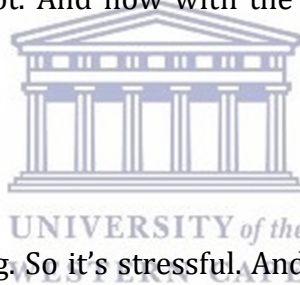
What is the right word?

I don't know. We really do love Soraya.

Do you spend a lot of time with her?

She comes over for dinner a lot. And now with the wedding, we're doing a lot of planning.

Is it easy going?



More or less. But it's a wedding. So it's stressful. And plus we are trying to respect both sets of customs, South African and Egyptian.

How's that working out?

Sorry for laughing. But what do you compare it to? I really don't know if it's right or not. I have an idea that I'm thinking of floating with the family. Why don't we do neither. We just have a Western wedding.

Do you think that'll go over well?

I'm really not sure. It'll go over well with me. Besides, Cape Malay weddings have become very Western.

What do you mean by Western exactly.

You know, white wedding dress. Tuxedos. The couple on stage.

And church?

No. But they can get married at the mosque and then keep it very Western. You know, the more I talk about it, the better the idea sounds. I'm going to speak to Gus, Raania and my hubby tomorrow.

What about the bride and groom? Should they not be a part of this?

Yes, they can come too.



The First (Non)Date

“This is not a date.” Soraya is friendly but clear.

Omar smiles and decides he’ll play along. “Ok, Soraya. This is not a date. Just a charming young gentleman and a young pretty girl having dinner at a romantic Italian restaurant and getting to know each other.”

Soraya gives Omar a blank stare but he can detect the beginnings of a smile. Eventually the smile wins out and she just shakes her head.

“See? I knew you had nice teeth. You should smile more.”

“I smile a lot actually. But a lot of times the company doesn’t give me a lot to smile about.”

“Well then, I’m glad I make you smile.”



Again, Soraya tries to suppress her smile and again she fails. Why on earth is this silly little boy making her smile every time? They meet on the corner of Giles and Eerie, right in the heart of Little Italy in Windsor. Omar is too nervous to try to hug her or even shake her hand to greet her.

“I think I know the answer to this, but --- why didn’t you want me to pick you up at your house?” Omar asks.

“Are you ready to ask my parents for my hand in marriage?”

“What? Um, no.”

“Then you’re not ready to meet my parents. It’s a bit complicated with my parents. They think that guys are only after one thing. Marriage.” They have trouble walking in a straight line through the laughter as they continue towards the restaurant.

* * *

They sit on opposite sides of a tiny table for two. They are in a darkened corner with only a candle on the table between them. They’ve spoken on the phone every night since they met, and now, finally, they sit so close their knees are almost touching.

Silence.

Soraya tries to break the ice and says with an uneasy laugh. “This is a little awkward.” She learns quickly that one shouldn’t try to make things less awkward by pointing out how awkward things are.



Silence.

“Maybe we should order. We’ll be chattier with full stomachs.”

Their waiter comes to their table and they order their meals. Omar, very aware of his student budget, orders the cheapest meal on the menu: a very bland-sounding creamy tomato pasta. He shudders as Soraya orders the seafood pasta and a virgin mojito.

“Ok, I have an idea,” Omar starts. “Let’s play a game where we each get to ask each other five questions. The only rule is that we must be honest.”

“Ok, cool. I have a few questions I wanted to ask you anyway.”

“Ok, I’ll go first. What is the movie you tell people was your favorite and what was your real favorite growing up?”

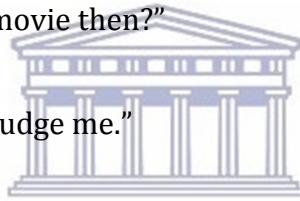
“What do you mean by that?”

“Simple, people always *say* that their favorite movie was some classic or clever movie because they want to sound intelligent and cultured. Like they’ll say their favorite movie is *Gone with the Wind* or *Citizen Kane* when in actual fact, their favorite movie is *Legally Blond*.”

Soraya starts to laugh and her cheeks become rosier than the creamy tomato pasta. It’s like he’s describing her.

“Ok, I actually *do* do that. I tell everyone that my favorite movie is *My Fair Lady*. I don’t think I’ve even seen the whole movie.”

“So what’s really your favorite movie then?”



“I’ll tell you, but then you can’t judge me.”

I’m going to judge you every which way from Sunday. “Of course I won’t judge you.”

WESTERN CAPE

“Ok, but I can explain.”

“You don’t have to.”

“But there is an explanation.”

“Just tell me.”

“It’s *Cool as Ice*.”

“*Cool as Ice*. Why does that sound familiar?”

“Um, it’s a movie from the early nineties starring Vanilla Ice.”

“Vanilla Ice?”

“Yes, he comes to a town on a motorcycle and this girl falls in love with him.”

“Vanilla Ice?”

“It’s an underrated movie. The father hates him because he’s a rapper and tries to keep them apart.”

“This is --- wow! I didn’t expect this.”

“I was about eight. Me and my cousins used to watch the movie over and over again.”

“I don’t know what to say about that. I expected something bad, but this ...”

“Stop it.” Soraya playfully pushes Omar’s arm and feigns offence. “It’s not that bad.”

“Ok, ok. I think it’s better if we just move on. Your turn. Ask me anything.”

“Ok, first question: do you expect your wife to wear a hijab?”

“Oh. A serious question. To be honest, yes, I would. It’s kind of an expectation in my family. A lot of my girl cousins don’t wear it when they’re single, but after marriage, everyone in my family wears it.”

Soraya ponders this. Her long, silky hair flows over her shoulders as their eyes meet after his answer. She only wears her hijab at religious events. She believes in her heart that she will wear the hijab at some point, but she also believes her blessed hair is her best feature. Despite herself, she starts twirling her hair around her fingers.

“Ok, let me internalize that for a bit. Your turn again.”

“Ok. What’s your favorite comfort food? The kind of food that you eat when your best friend betrays you and you just failed an exam.”

“Well, I never fail exams. Let’s say if I get a B or a B+.”

Omar summons all of his willpower and manages not to roll his eyes. It exhausts him.

“Ok, let’s say you got a B.”

“Ok, I don’t even have to think about it. I love chocolate brownies and vanilla ice-cream. It must be the brownies from A&P, not from a confectioner.”

“You prefer the brownies from the grocery store over the confectioner?”

“Yes. The one that costs like four dollars for the whole thing and you have to cut squares from it like a cake.”



“I know the one.”

“You have to microwave the brownies so that the chocolate gets gooey and you must have really good vanilla ice-cream, the kind with black specks from real vanilla beans.”

“So cheap brownies and expensive ice cream.”

“Yes. It’s to die for.”

“So you’re a chocolate lover. I’ll make a note of that. This restaurant serves brownies so we’ll have to order some for dessert.”

“Oooo, sounds like a plan. Ok, my turn again. Second question: Will you let your wife work or study after she has kids?”

“Wow. Another haymaker. I don’t know, I’d love someone at home taking care of our kids, but I don’t think it’s realistic anymore. My mom worked most of my life as a teacher. Of course, teaching is one of those jobs that is perfect for mothers because you’re free when the kids come home from school. I guess there’s always daycare. But then you have strangers raising your kids. And it’s not fair to just use your parents because they’ll be older and it doesn’t seem fair to make them chase after young children. I mean, they’ll be senior citizens. But then you may not have a choice. Ok, I’m yammering on. I guess there’d be a lot to be discussed.”

Soraya gives Omar a reassuring smile. She likes his answer; he is thoughtful. “Your turn again. You can make me yammer this time.”

“Favorite book.”

“Oh, that’s easy. The *Harry Potter* series. Every summer I reread those books. The movies really don’t do them justice. Have you read them?”

“I haven’t read them, but I’ve tried to watch the two movies. I fell asleep in the theater during the first one. When I woke up my head was resting on the shoulder of the guy next to me. To this day I have no idea why he didn’t wake me.”

“You’re joking!”

“Swear to God.”

“You should try the books.”

“Ok, they’re on my list now. Ok, next question.”

“Ok, question number three: How often do you pray? And what about your family?”

Omar smiles and slowly starts shaking his head. They seem to be playing two different games here, Omar is trying to get to know her on a personal level, and Soraya is creating his marriage CV.

“This is such a personal question.”

“I know. It’s important to me though. I’m going through my own things so I kind of want to know.”

“What things are you going through?”

“Well, my parents don’t go to the mosque often and they don’t really pray at home. Since I started university and especially since I joined the Muslim Society on campus, I started to pray more and go to the mosque.”

“I’m surprised. I thought your parents were really conservative.”

“They are really conservative. They’re just not very religious. Well, my Dad’s not anyway. He still wants me to be a good little Egyptian girl, but Islam has very little to do with it. If he knew I was out with you, there would be big trouble.”

“You wouldn’t get a hiding or anything would you?”

“No. But *you* might. I’d just get yelled at.”

Omar isn’t sure if she is joking and laughs nervously. She continues, “I think he’s happy that I’m becoming more religious, but he’s not joining me. It’s a bit tough.”

“And your mom?”

“She’s more religious. And she socializes and teaches at the mosque. She’s socially religious if you know what I mean.”

“My parents are a bit more religious I guess. We pray together at home. And we go the mosque pretty regularly. Funny thing though, if they knew that I was on a date with you, they’d be fine with it. In fact, they *do* know.”

“What! Did you tell them?”

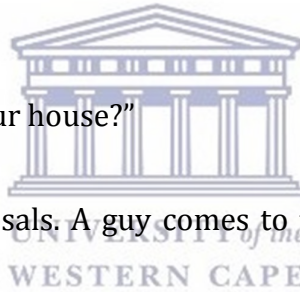
“I told them that I like a girl and that I’m taking her out. I told them about you when I first met you.”

“That is so strange. I would never tell my parents unless I was ready to get married.”

“So you’ve never told your parents about a boy you liked?”

“Never.”

“So no guy has come over to your house?”



“Actually, I’ve had a few proposals. A guy comes to the house with his family and asks for my hand.”

“Hectic. That sounds nerve wracking.”

“Not really. Sometimes I guess. Imagine meeting a guy for the first time and then having to accept a proposal. And sometimes you can immediately tell exactly what they are like and what they want me to be like. That’s actually better so at least you know what you’re saying yes or no to. There was this one guy who was from a really religious family and my mom and dad warned me how religious they were. So when they came I decided to wear a hijab.”

“Probably not a good idea to act differently than you usually do in those situations.”

“You’re right. The guy was just too strict. So I had some hair sticking out of my hijab. You know, a little fringe. And the guy actually said that the fringe *displeased* him. He used the word *displeased*.”

“Jeeze. I take it you never saw him again?”

“Um, actually, I accepted the proposal.”

“What? Are you engaged now?”

“Of course not. We broke it off.”

“When did this happen?”

“When I was seventeen.”

“You were engaged at seventeen?”



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“Hey, you were only allowed five questions.” Her attempt at humor goes nowhere.

“Yes, I was engaged at seventeen. I think Arabs get married younger than you guys.”

“If this guy came off so controlling why did you accept the proposal?”

“He was hot.”

Omar feels a sharp spike travel clean through his chest. He is injured. Petty jealousy and Omar had never been good friends. Soraya can see that Omar is reeling and she touches his hand and says, “Come on Omar. You’re good-looking too. That’s why I agreed to meet you for dinner.” His chest starts moving as she flashes her smile.

He smiles back at her meekly. “So what happened?”

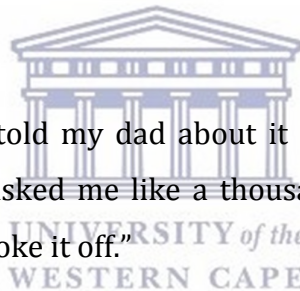
“I had to break it off. It felt like I had a third parent. He kept complaining about how I acted and what I thought. It was infuriating. The last straw was at the mall. I had just graduated from high school about a week before and I saw a guy from my class. So he stops and we chat about what we’re going to do after school. The whole conversation lasted like five minutes. Ten or fifteen, tops. After my friend leaves, my fiancé just loses it. Tells me that if I want to flirt with other guys then I should find another fiancé.”

“Touchy.”

“I know. And then we don’t go to the movies like we planned and he actually takes me home. I was completely dumbstruck. I didn’t know what to say.”

“So you broke it off then?”

“Kind of. The next morning, I told my dad about it and said that I didn’t want to marry him anymore. My dad asked me like a thousand times if I was sure. I was adamant. So my dad actually broke it off.”



“Your dad broke it off for you? Not your bravest moment.”

“I guess not. It’s difficult to say that to a guy though. I heard through the grapevine that he was crushed.”

“I’ll bet. That’s quite a story. I can’t believe you were engaged.”

“I know.”

“When you told me that you don’t date, I never thought you’d be engaged.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

The silence is deafening.

“Omar, can I ask you a question? How many girls have you dated?”

“How many?”

“Yes, I’ve heard a few things.”

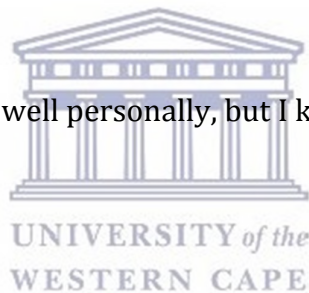
“I’ve had two girlfriends. One in Cape Town and one here. I’ve been on a few dates with girls that didn’t go anywhere.”

“I know the girl you dated here. The Lebanese girl.”

“Crap.”

“Actually, I don’t know her that well personally, but I know *of* her.”

“Crap.”



“She’s not too popular in my circle. Do you know why?”

“Soraya, let’s leave that for the second date. Assuming there will be a second date.”

“I think there will. If you want one also.”

“I do.”

“And this isn’t a date.”

“Ok, ok. Let’s get back to the lighthearted stuff. I asked you about movies and books. We still haven’t discussed music. What kind of music are you into?”

“Straight up gangsta rap.”

“Really?”

“Omar, you’re so gullible.”



Part 2. Clash of Civilizations



Boy meets girl's dad

“Please come in. So you are this *Omar* that I’m hearing so much about.” Soraya’s father’s words are inviting but his tone is quite stern. Omar looks him in the eye and shakes his hand. He is determined to be seen as a man, not a boy.

“Thank you, Mr Almasi.”

“Please, all the youngsters call me Uncle Gus.”

“Ok. Thank you, Uncle Gus.” Omar steps inside and hands Uncle Gus a tray of baklawa. He takes the tray in his hands and looks at it with a crooked smile. He thinks, *this boy comes to an Arab home and brings a stereotypical Arab dessert*. Gus wonders if he would bring a tray of burritos if he were Hispanic. He is about to make a snide remark when he concedes that everyone in his family *does* love baklawa and they do look quite good. He will let this go.

“Please, Omar, sit down.” Omar walks into the living room, hoping to see Soraya, but is instead greeted by an unoccupied lounge suite. A middle-aged lady bearing a striking resemblance to Soraya enters from the kitchen. Omar studies her carefully and ponders that this is what Soraya will look like in twenty-five years: *I can live with that*.

“This is my wife, Raania.” She takes the tray of baklawa and looks at Omar with an irresistible smile, identical to Soraya’s.

“I finally get to meet you. Soraya has told me so much about you.”

“Yes, apparently Soraya has told everyone about you except me.” Uncle Gus’ smile is still planted on his face but his eyes have narrowed into a predatory glare.

Omar sits down on a chair and Uncle Gus and Aunt Raania sit on the love seat directly opposite him. For some reason Omar had expected the living room to be filled with Arab-themed décor and paraphernalia, but instead the living room is unassuming with a Western-styled white leather lounge suite.

“Ok.” Omar’s nerves start to betray him. He tries to clear his throat but instead makes an incredibly strange nasal sound. He gathers himself and spits out the words he came to say. “I think you know why I’m here. I want to ask for Soraya’s hand in marriage.”

Gus and Raania impassively stare at Omar for a few seconds until Gus eventually simply says, “I see.”

Omar isn’t sure if he is supposed to elaborate on the request or if he should wait for an answer. He starts to think about what he can say to break the silence but can’t think of anything. He is fairly certain that Gus should be speaking.

Mercifully, Gus ends the silence. “Look, Omar, I’ve only discovered that you were coming here a few hours ago. Before then, I didn’t know that you even existed. Soraya told me that she has to speak to me and then blurted out that she met a boy and that he’s coming tonight to propose. I asked a few questions but I haven’t had any time to think about this. I don’t know anything about you.”

“I know. Look, I come from a good Muslim family. I’m educated. I’ll take amazing care of your daughter. You can ask me anything that you need to know.”

Gus takes a deep breath and rubs his eyes. “Ok. Let’s start with where you’re from. So you’re not Egyptian.”

“No.”

“You’re not even an Arab.”

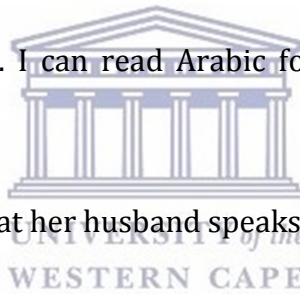
Even?

“I was expecting an African,” Gus continued, “You are obviously not from southern Africa. I’m a bit confused about that.”

“I am actually from South Africa. My family has lived there for generations. We’re of Malaysian and European descent.”

Gus looks unconvinced. “Do you speak Arabic?”

“No, I don’t. I speak Afrikaans. I can read Arabic for prayers though. But Soraya doesn’t speak Arabic either.”



“That’s why it’s so important that her husband speaks Arabic.”

Now it was Omar who looked unconvinced. Gus sighs. “So you’re studying to be a computer mechanic?”

“I’m doing my Bachelor’s of Applied Science in Computer Engineering.”

“I guess computers is a good field to go into. What do your parents do?”

“My dad is an electrical engineer at Ford in Detroit. My mom was a teacher in South Africa, but she’s retired now.”

For the first time, Raania enters the conversation. “Really? I was also a teacher when I was very young in Egypt.”

Omar can sense that he is on the verge of having an ally in this conversation. “Oh yes, Soraya said that you used to teach. Aunty and my mom could probably swap a lot of teaching stories.”

“I do miss it at times. I sometimes teach the little ones at the mosque and help out at the madrassa.”

“I’m sure my mother would love to help out at the madrassa.”

“Wonderful. I can introduce her to the ladies.”

Gus wants to keep the conversation on track. “Let’s get back to what we’re talking about. Omar, this is quite difficult for us. You seem like a good young man, but I’m going to be honest. You’re not what we had in mind for our daughter.”

This stings. Omar was prepared for it, and he tells himself that what matters is that Soraya loves him, not that her father loves him. But it still stings.

Gus’ words hang in the air. Omar decides to simply say what he is feeling. “I know I’m not what you would have chosen. But I am what Soraya wants. I’m a good person. We want to get married.”

Once again, the words hang in the air. Omar’s face feels like it is warmer than the rest of his body. He suddenly becomes very aware of his hands, which are on his knees and feeling quite unnatural. Rania turns to her husband and says something to him in Arabic.

Raania turns towards Omar. “Sorry, we just need to say a few words.”

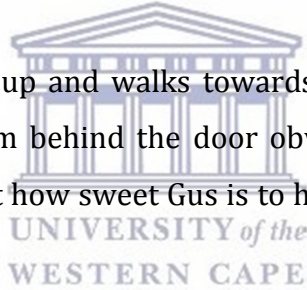
They speak in Arabic for about thirty seconds and Gus starts shaking his head. He is not happy. He looks at Omar with stern eyes. “Look, Omar, this is very difficult for us.

I understand what you're feeling right now seems like the most important thing in the world. We also felt those feelings." Omar manages not to snort in derision as he is patronized. He *knows* how he feels. *How could Gus know when he was probably arranged to his cousin*, he thinks. Gus' eyes soften slightly as he continues, "But I can't say yes to you. At least not now. I don't know you and I don't know your family. But what we can do is we can get to know each other. You can start to come over for dinner in the evenings. I'd also like to have your family over. We can take it from there."

Omar smiles. "Thank you, uncle. Yes, let's do that."

Omar's smile doesn't dissipate. Gus looks over to his wife and smiles. "My Queen Raania, perhaps we should serve the baklawa. And some tea."

Raania lovingly smiles, stands up and walks towards the kitchen. Omar catches a glimpse of Soraya peeking from behind the door obviously eavesdropping on the conversation. He is surprised at how sweet Gus is to his wife. *So the grumpy old bear has a soft spot*, he thinks.



Gus looks at Omar once again with the most intense eyes, but this time, there is no smile. He starts to speak softly, just loud enough for Omar to hear, "I want you to listen to me very carefully. I know that you see Soraya at university every day. I'm sure that when she goes out to visit her *friends* that she's seeing you. I want you to listen to me now carefully. If you touch her in an improper way, I will break your fingers. Me, my brothers, and Soraya's cousins, we'll all come visit you. You'll have a thousand Arabs knocking on your door."

Omar answers solemnly. "I respect her too much to do anything like that."

“You’re not listening to me. We will hurt you. You think I don’t know what’s on your mind? You think I don’t know what you’re feeling? That’s my little girl. I want you to know what we’ll do if you touch her in a bad way. I will kill you.”

“I understand.”

And he did.

Interview, 8 March 2004, morning: Omar (*the groom*)

Things were actually quite easy when we were first going out. I saw her every day on campus and we managed to spend a lot of time together.

And now?

I still see her but she always has to be home straight after class. It’s actually stressful because her dad always assumes it’s because of me that she’s late. Now she’s afraid to stay after class to ask the prof a question.

So you don’t see her in the evenings? Or the weekends?

Actually, I have dinner there almost every night. But her parents don’t want us to go out much. And when we are allowed out, they are constantly calling and SMS-ing. And heaven help her if she doesn’t reply immediately.

What happens if she doesn’t?

She gets into trouble. We are going to be married in two months and they’re still watching us like hawks. It’s ridiculous.

It will be more special this way when you two are alone after the wedding.

Oh my God. You didn't just say that.

Sorry. I'm trying to be helpful.

Anyway.

How are the wedding plans going?

I'm not really involved with the wedding plans. It's being run by our mothers and Soraya's sisters. And to a lesser extent, Soraya. But I have no say in this.

You must be exaggerating.

No, I'm not. A month ago I thought I was involved, but it became pretty clear that I have no say in what happens.

Really? Give me an example.



So you've seen the condo that we bought by the river, right?

Yes.

So we were trying to decide what color to paint it, and what curtains to put up and what furniture to buy and where to put it. All of that stuff. So our moms asked me for my opinion on the paint. I said I wanted a dark grey for three of the walls and red for the main wall.

That's very fashion-forward.

Well, they said a dark color makes the room look smaller so we can't use dark grey. So then I'm like fine, we can use light grey. But then they say that that was too dreary, but cream was a good alternative. So I agree to cream and then they say that

the red wall I wanted would go with dark grey, but not the cream that we have just decided, so my red wall has got to go. So they say that we'll go with a brown wall instead of red. So we've ended up with three cream walls and one brown wall, which – surprise, surprise – is what they suggested at the beginning.

That's quite funny.

No, it's annoying. They are doing that with *everything*. They pretend that I have a decision to make then they totally steamroll me. I have no say whatsoever in the wedding reception either. Or where we're taking pictures.

Does it matter that much to you?

Most of it, no. But there are some things that I want. They want to take wedding pictures at Jackson Park by all the roses. But that's been done to death. So I had this idea that we could go to a factory, the train station and a scrap yard and take pictures there. It would be so different. Imagine how it would look. She in her wedding dress and with her bridesmaids. Me in a tux. Imagine the contrast with our surroundings.

Sounds like a great idea.

And it was shot down. It bugs me. At the end of the day, we have to live in the condo and it's *our* wedding. We should be making these decisions.

Omar, I'm going to break a rule right now. You know that as an interviewer, I'm supposed to ask questions and not necessarily give my opinion. But I really need to tell you something. It's the wedding advice my dad gave to me before he passed away.

What is it?

He told me to remember: the wedding day is about the family, the wedding night is about you and your wife. Let your family have their way with the reception and things. You and your wife will be alone that night and then for the rest of your lives. After the wedding, you two will make every decision.

That's actually not too bad. Did you listen to the advice?

All three times.

Interview, 8 March 2004, late morning: Soraya (*the bride*)

How are the plans coming along?

It's very stressful. I'm beginning to think I should have taken the semester off.

Why didn't you?

Because then I'd graduate a year late. Not an option.

Ok. So besides it being stressful, is everything on schedule.

Everything with the wedding reception is set. We're a bit behind with the condo. Omar is fighting with everybody to get his way. I have no idea why. But I think we're doing fine.

It must be much easier the second time.

What? What do you mean?

You were engaged before, weren't you?

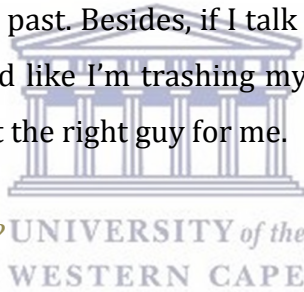
I was, but we weren't at the point when we were making solid plans for a wedding. Besides, I really don't want to talk about that.

Sorry. I don't want you to talk about anything you're not comfortable with. We don't have to talk about it. I understand it may bring up some unresolved issues.

No, that's not it. There are no unresolved issues. We haven't been in contact since we broke it off. It was a clean break.

Does it upset Omar?

I don't think so. He's very secure. He was a bit surprised when I told him I was engaged before. But Omar has had girlfriends. He's fine. It's just that it's in the past. Why talk about things from the past. Besides, if I talk about it and I start to say why it didn't work out, it may sound like I'm trashing my ex-fiancé. And I'm really not. He's a good guy. He's simply not the right guy for me.



You're not afraid of him are you?

Afraid of Yusuf? Of course not.

His name is Yusuf? So he was also Muslim.

Yes. Also Egyptian. And he's not a scary guy. He was just a bit --- I have to be careful with this word because it can be twisted to sound worse --- *overbearing*. Everything I said offended him. It was always wrong. I just felt like he needed to lighten up a bit. He was so uptight about everything. I felt like I had a third parent. When I ended it, I heard he was pretty upset after. Maybe that's a lesson that he had to learn. I'm sure he's learned not to be so overwhelming. And that's a good thing.

So you think it's a good thing that he had his heart broken because he learned a valuable lesson?

No! That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying that there's a silver lining. We both learned a lot from that.

Ok, I see.

Crap. Now I feel like I'm trashing him. This is not what I wanted. He's not even here to defend himself.

Do you want us to interview him as well?

No! Look, I really need a break right now. We weren't supposed to talk about my relationship history at all. How did we get here? Damn, can we continue this later?

Of course.



Interview, 8 March 2004, evening: Sedick (*the groom's father*)

So what is your relationship like with Gafoor?

Who? Gus? It's pretty good. It's like getting a crash course in friendship. He's going to be family, so we're getting to know each other very quickly.

So your families never met before this.

No. He looks familiar though, which is not surprising. The Muslim community in Windsor is very small.

So you're happy they are going to be your in-laws?

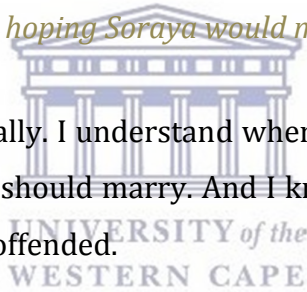
Yes, overall. I'm not going to lie, I always pictured Omar marrying a nice girl from Cape Town. But I also have to be reasonable, we moved to Canada and there aren't too many Muslim Capetonians, so I'm just glad he chose a Muslim girl from a decent family.

Do you think Gus feels the same way?

I do. Gus and I have a few things in common. We both moved our families to Canada which means our kids aren't growing up in the same environment as we did. My big fear was that Omar was going to marry some girl who wasn't Muslim. I know that sounds harsh, but it's really a concern. I was relieved when he told us that he liked a girl named Soraya. I'm sure Gus felt the same way.

Do you get the sense that he was hoping Soraya would marry an Egyptian?

A bit. But I don't take it personally. I understand where he's coming from. Everyone has an image of who their kids should marry. And I know Egyptians are very proud of their heritage. I'm really not offended.



Are you as proud of your South African heritage?

Sorry for laughing. But no one is as proud of their heritage as the Arabs. It's a bit more complicated for us.

I was wondering how I could ask this, so I guess this is a good lead-in. You seem very --- fair-skinned for Africans. You refer to yourself as a Cape Malay. I understand that is a sub-designation of the Coloured group during Apartheid.

I guess that's the best way to describe it.

And Coloureds are people of mixed-race, people who don't exclusively identify as White, Black, or Indian.

Something like that.

I suppose you know, in North America, colored is an antiquated word for African-Americans. It's uncomfortable for me to even use the word. Please stop me if you feel this line of questioning is out of order.

You're doing fine, don't worry.

Ok. Are you familiar with your family heritage?

I am aware of what I've been told. Apparently, most of my lineage is German. A bit of British and Malay. That's what I've been told.

You sound skeptical.



I am. Let me explain why I'm skeptical with a crude joke. "How do you know you're Coloured? All of your grandparents are European."

I don't get it. But it sounds racist.

Apartheid taught us to favor our European lineage and almost shun our non-European side. You know what I mean? So I grew up with stories about my German great-grandparents. But I don't know how accurate those stories are. I have a feeling they are exaggerated.

I'm really not following.

I was told that my paternal great-grandfather was a German businessman named Alistair Kunze.

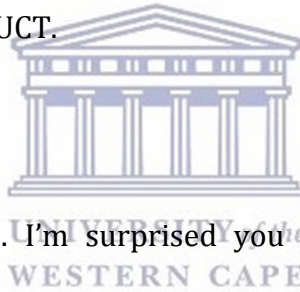
Alistair? Is that German?

No, it's actually Scottish. That's part of the strangeness of it. Apparently, he fell in love with a Malay woman who was Muslim, my great-grandmother, Ayesha. So the story goes that he converted to Islam, changed his name to Omar, married her and had a child. He died soon after and Ayesha had to raise the child on her own. She decided that the child would keep *her* family name because his German family disowned him for marrying a non-white. So that's where the German blood comes from.

That's an interesting story.

Well that's just it. It may just be a story. I became very interested in my family history when I was studying at UCT.

UCT?



The University of Cape Town. I'm surprised you never heard of it. It's world renowned.

Um, ok.

Anyway, I tried to look into my family history and the strangest thing was that I couldn't find a record of an Alistair Kunze. And obviously no Omar Kunze, his Muslim name.

Interesting.

Very. I was studying in the late seventies so you can just imagine the political climate in South Africa.

Um, yes. It was bad, right?

You could say that. One of the interesting things that I learned back then was that it was common practice for the white *settlers* to use the black and coloured *help* as mistresses. If they fell pregnant, there were a few things the settler may have done. Sometimes he would marry the girl in secret and take care of his secret family from a distance. Sometimes he'd pay, and maybe threaten the girl to stay quiet. Sometimes he'd simply deny it and abandon the girl all together, even taking away her job and home. The point is, this created thousands of *coloured* children. So now you had these single mothers raising these children and these mothers had to explain to these children as they got older who their fathers were and why they weren't around. So they told these children fairy tales of marriage and loss, that they were all a happy family but their fathers died in some fashion. Sometimes it was a heart-attack, sometimes they had to go back to Europe and the boat sank, other times they made it to Europe but died there.

Are you saying this is what happened with your great-grandmother?

I'm saying I don't know. There's no record of this Alistair Kunze, even though a German with a Scottish name is very distinctive. Our family story sounds very much like one of those fairy tales that were told to children instead of the truth, which is that their fathers used their mothers and abandoned them. It's quite understandable to create a fairy tale.

What do you believe?

I believe that I *want* to believe the story. I named my son after this mythic figure in my family tree. Just because I can't find a record of this man doesn't mean that he doesn't exist. I can't find any record of two of my great-grandparents on my mother's side, but I know they exist.

Anyway, back to your question, I don't have the same pride in my family tree as Gus does because my family heritage is more complex. I'm more proud to be Muslim than South African or Cape Malay or Coloured or whatever.

Explain that.

There's nothing really to explain. I guess I just identify myself more as a Muslim than Cape Malay or Coloured. We don't speak Malay or really know that much of our culture. It really *was* taken away from us. But our ancestors held on to their religion. And that has been preserved over the generations in a way that our culture wasn't. It connected us to each other and now it connects us to the rest of the Muslim world.

Do you think it's the same for Gus?

I have no idea.

Do you think he's very ethnocentric?

You really have to ask him.



Interview, 9 March 2004: Reema (the groom's ex-girlfriend)

I'm not a hundred percent sure why I'm here.

We're interviewing many of the guests who are coming to the wedding.

Ok. So what would you like to know.

Why don't you introduce yourself?

Ok. I'm Reema. I've lived in Windsor since I was three, but I was born in Beirut.

So you're Lebanese?

Well, I've been in Canada since I was three, so I'm actually more Canadian.

But you're of Arabic descent. Like Soraya.

Firstly, Arabic is a language. I'm of Arab decent. Secondly, Soraya is Egyptian and I'm Lebanese. It's very different.

Sorry. And how do you know Omar?

I'm a family friend and have known Omar and the Daniels since they moved to Canada --- how long has it been --- five years I think. And me and my family have been invited to the wedding.

And?

And?

And?



Ok. And ... I am Omar's ex-girlfriend. It's not a big deal.

It's a bit interesting. You're going to the wedding.

With my parents, my brother, and my sister.

And you and Omar are still friends.

Yeah, we're still good. I have to say though, this conversation is very unsettling with a camera staring at me.

Try to ignore the camera and just be yourself.

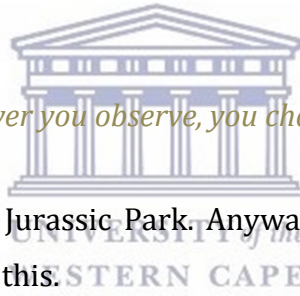
It's kind of difficult. Even before I came in here, it was pretty uncomfortable in the dining room.

Why?

Because I was chatting with Aunty Mishqah and there was a microphone, literally hanging above my head. I really don't see how everyone can be normal with the microphones and cameras everywhere. Whatever you observe, you change.

The Hawthorne Effect.

What's *The Hawthorne Effect*?



What you just described: Whatever you observe, you change.

Whatever it's called. It was in Jurassic Park. Anyway, no one can act normal. I'm surprised the Daniels agreed to this.

It was Soraya's idea.

Why am I not surprised.

What do you mean?

Nothing.

It's ok. Say what's on your mind.

It's nothing. Really.

Except?

Except nothing. It's really nothing. It's just that ...

It's just that?

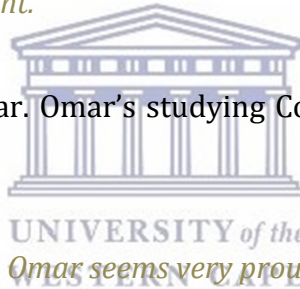
Soraya loves the spotlight. Has she told you she's a straight A student in sociology?

I guess this is a good lead in. What do you think of Soraya?

She's fine, really. I'm just joking about the spotlight thing. And it's great that she's at university.

She seems like an excellent student.

Yes. But not as talented as Omar. Omar's studying Computer Engineering, which is much more difficult.



I don't think they are competing. Omar seems very proud of Soraya.

Oh please. It works on Omar's nerves sometimes, when she says how great her marks are. Do you know what Omar calls sociology? The study of the obvious.

....

Damn it. Can we not use this. It came out really wrong.

It's ok. You're just saying what's on your mind.

It sounds like I have a problem with her or something. I really don't. Sometimes I think that she has a problem with me.

Perhaps because you had a relationship with Omar? And you're still friends with the family.

And Omar. And it was so long ago. It's ancient history. It was over two years ago.

Why did you break up?

It was a mutual thing. We both felt that we weren't ready for something serious. We both needed to live life.

It's very rare that a breakup is mutual.

Well ours was the exception. Let's move on.

Did you know Soraya before she met Omar?

A bit. Look, I'm really feeling uncomfortable. I think I'm going to go. Thanks for this.

Wait, we're just talking.

No really. I have to go.

We can talk about something else. Ok, well, if you ever want to talk, you can come back any time.



Part 3. Here Come the Africans



Interview, 8 May 2004, morning: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

Teela. What an unusual name.

It's really Taliya. Which itself is still quite unusual. I guess I'm unique.

Indeed you are. Does it have a meaning?

It means 'morning dew'.

Very pretty. So tell me about your relationship with your cousin, Omar.

Ok. The camera staring at me is a bit unnerving.

I understand that. Try to ignore it and pretend that we're just having a regular conversation. Just look at me instead of the camera and you'll be just fine.



Ok, I'll try. But having everything I say broadcast on TV is pretty scary.

Not everything you say will be on TV. We have hundreds, probably thousands of hours of audio and video, but the entire documentary is only forty-four minutes. We only take the best parts, so don't worry too much. Mostly we use the audio of these interviews as voice-overs for other video clips of the wedding prep and actual wedding.

That's actually comforting.

We may even ask you to repeat certain things if you cough or stutter.

Really? That seems --- I dunno --- fake. I mean, for a documentary?

It's actually quite common. There's nothing wrong with it. We don't change any fundamental narrative. We simply repeat the existing story more clearly.

Ok, I guess. Well, as you said, Omar is my cousin. Our moms are sisters. We basically grew up together. There are four cousins who are only a year apart: me, Omar, Fayaaz, and Shaheed. The four of us were always together. They were like my brothers.

'Were'. Why do speak of them in the past tense?

Didn't realize I was doing that. I guess it is a bit different now. Obviously Omar moved to Canada four years ago. I missed him a lot. *Miss* him. I *miss* him a lot. He was like the glue in the group. I still see Fayaaz and Shaheed, but not as often.

Are Fayaaz or Shaheed married?

No, they're too busy having fun.

Are you married?

Nope.



Engaged?

No.

Boyfriend?

No. I haven't been lucky enough to find someone in university. But I'm only twenty.

So Omar is the first of your group to get married. Does that surprise you?

Yes and no. Fayaaz and Shaheed were the ones who were always chasing girls, more so than Omar. But Omar was more serious about the girls he liked. So I guess it makes sense.

Have you met Soraya yet?

Yes, I met her last night.

And?

She seems really nice. I haven't had a chance to really connect with her yet. I had a long chat with Omar last night though. We chat on MSN all the time but it really isn't the same as face to face. He told me all about Soraya and how they met and everything. He really loves her.

Really? Did he say that?

Say what?

That he loves her.

What do you mean?



Well, he never actually said that in our interviews. He doesn't actually use those words. Has he actually said that to you?

Well, maybe not in so many words. But obviously they love each other.

Ok.

Why else would they get married?

I'm not sure. There are many reasons. They talk about how compatible they are. And how they have similar life-goals.

....

You seem distracted.

I'm just thinking about what you said. Obviously they love each other. I really think he does.

Let's change gears. Continue what you were saying about meeting Soraya.

Ok. She's lovely. Really lovely.

But?

No 'but'. She seems really nice.

It sounds like you have a reservation.

It's not even a reservation. It's not even a ...

Thought?

Yes, it's not even a thought.



It's something small.

It's just ... Soraya's dad doesn't sound thrilled that she's marrying Omar. It's like he's only grudgingly accepting this.

Is that a problem?

I don't know. It's not ideal. It kinda reminds me of something. Omar and I have a cousin. He's Fayaaz's older brother. He got married to a girl whose father didn't like him. That marriage was a nightmare. They were always fighting and separating. And

then the whole family would talk about it and know their private business. I guess that's one of the cons of having a close family.

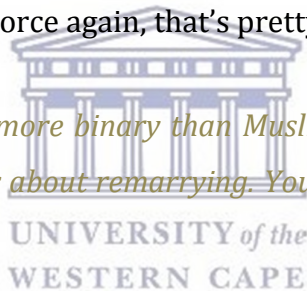
Are they still together?

Kind of. They got divorced, then remarried, then divorced again. Last I heard they wanted to get married again.

I may be incorrect here, but based on my research, I thought Muslims weren't allowed to marry the same person unless they were married to someone else first.

That's if you talak three times. Talak is a form of Islamic divorce. If the man only talaks you once, then you can remarry. So now he's talak'ed her twice already, so if they get remarried and they divorce again, that's pretty much it for them.

I guess Western marriages are more binary than Muslim ones. You're either married or you're not. There are no rules about remarrying. You're quite knowledgeable about Islamic marriages.



Not really. Everyone learns this in madrassa. And plus when my cousin went through all of this and everyone was talking about it, it's like getting a revision class in the rules of divorce in Islam.

And what do you think the problem was?

Look, I don't know what the real problem was. Only my cousin and his ex-wife know for sure. But what I do know is that his ex-wife's father made things worse because he never liked my cousin. Whatever fight they were having, the father would add stamps. They would pump up his ex-wife so that she was even more upset and hated my cousin even more. They just kept making things worse.

Do you think that's going to happen with Omar and his soon-to-be father-in-law?

I don't know. I really hope not.

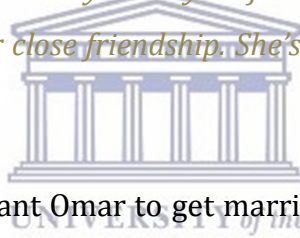
Are you sure?

Huh? Am I sure of what?

Are you sure that you hope everyone gets along?

Of course. Why would you even ask that?

It's not me. I'm just thinking about a theory that Soraya brought up. She's a bit afraid that you and Omar were so close that you may be jealous of someone else taking him away, getting in the way of your close friendship. She's afraid that you'll find a reason not to like her.



That's ridiculous. Of course I want Omar to get married and be happy. I don't know why Soraya would think that. I'm not in love with Omar like that. She probably thinks that because Arabs are always marrying their cousins. We don't.

I see.

Sorry. That's not what I meant. I was just surprised Soraya would think that. I didn't mean it the way it came out. Can you not air that?

That's really up to the producer. But I wouldn't worry.

I really don't have a problem with Soraya. Or Arabs.

Of course.

Interview, 8 May 2004, afternoon: Faatima, Jehaan, Ilhaam (Raania's sisters, the bride's aunts)

Welcome to Canada. I believe this is the first time you've been in the country.

They all say yes.

And you are Raania's sisters.

They say yes.

And you don't speak any English.

They say yes.

I can see them nodding. You don't have to translate a nod. What are your first impressions of Canada?



They say they like it.

And Windsor? What do you think of the city?

They like that too.

They seem to be talking a lot and you're only giving me a single sentence.

I'm giving you the gist of it. They're just rambling.

Give me everything they say.

Fine.

What was Raania like growing up?

Faatima says that she was very quiet. She was the third sister of four, so she used to just blend in. She was the peacemaker between them all the time. Ilhaam says that she was even the peacemaker between the cousins and friends at school. Everyone loved her.

Who's the eldest among you?

Faatima is the eldest. Then Ilhaam. Then Raania, Soraya's mom. And then Jehaan. Faatima said that Jehaan was spoilt. Then they all laughed.

I can see them laughing.

I'm just following your instructions.



What do they think about Soraya?

Faatima says they love Soraya. Unfortunately they only see her every other year or so. But she's such a lovely girl. Every time she's more and more a beautiful young lady. Jehaan says they were worried a bit because she was going to be raised in Canada, but even so, she's such a nice girl.

Does she remind you of Raania when Raania was young?

They all laugh and say no. They all point at Jehaan and say that she's like Jehaan.

Again, I can see them pointing. Don't tell me things that I can see with my own eyes. Just tell me what they're saying. Why does she remind you of Jehaan?

Jehaan says that she was also like that. She used to talk a lot. Soraya is nice and also bitchy.

Jehaan just said her niece was bitchy?

More or less. It's not a perfect translation.

Well 'bitchy' is a very powerful word.

Maybe 'mouthy' is a better translation. Or 'feisty'. Yes, let's go with feisty.

'Bitchy' and 'feisty' really make a big difference to what she is saying. You have to be careful. Ask her to go on. What's she saying now?

She's asking why you say so much but when I give them the Arabic translation, I say only a little.

Unbelievable. Talk about "lost in translation". Maybe this is a good time to end.



Interview, 8 May 2004, evening: Uncle Sammy/Samir (the bride's uncle)

It's actually a bit sad for me.

How so? Your niece is getting married and you're here and will be part of it.

I know. But it means a few things. It means that my brother really is Canadian. I always thought that maybe he and his family would return to Egypt. His kids would marry Egyptians and they would always have that link. But now, his youngest is marrying a Canadian. I see now that they are never coming home.

I'm sorry. You sound like you really miss him.

Very much. I always thought that he would eventually come home. He always has a place in the family. We have a big business in Cairo. We have a chain of grocery

stores. I always dreamed of him returning home and returning to the family business.

I don't think I've ever heard him refer to Cairo as home. Why do you think he's never returned to live?

Egypt will always be in his blood. Even if he doesn't call it home, it's still home. It's where our parents are buried. Believe me, it's home.

That's brilliant. We're definitely going to use that. It's the perfect voice-over. Can you say that again, but not so monotone.

Monotone? This is how I talk.

I know, but it will be the perfect voice over. It just needs a bit more ... something. Do you know what I mean?



....

Ok. Should I look at you or the camera?

It doesn't matter. We'll just use the audio so do whatever is most comfortable.

Ok. Egypt will always be in his blood. Believe me, it's home.

....

Actually, it was better the first time.

Can I continue? Canada is a great place to live. I don't deny that. I always have a wonderful time when I visit. But it isn't home. It may have beautiful streets and

amazing schools. But that's not what makes something home. It's not the government and not the buildings. It's family.

And now he will have more family in Canada.

I guess so.

So most of your family is still in Egypt?

Most, yes. We have some who have moved here and there. A few in the UK and of course Canada. But most are still in Egypt.

How do you feel about having essentially a Canadian nephew?

I'm not sure.

And how does your family feel? You have children, right?



I have two sons and a younger daughter ages twenty-eight, twenty-three and twenty-two. All of them are married. They all have newborns, so they couldn't come.

Wow. Three newborn grandchildren. It must be a wonderful experience.

It is. Every weekend, they all come over with their families. It's loud in the house, but it is wonderful.

I must say, your English is superb.

It should be. I was a professor of English Literature for many years at the University of Cairo.

I didn't know that. I thought you ran a chain of grocery shops.

I do, but my passion has always been literature, especially British and American literature. I can speak English, Arabic, French, Russian and Tamazight.

Remarkable.

I still teach from time to time. I am actually enjoying doing this interview in English.

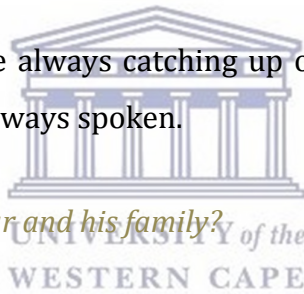
Do you practice speaking English with Gafoor?

To whom? Oh, Gafoor. That is quite an interesting pronunciation of my brother's name.

So I've been told.

But no, we speak Arabic. We're always catching up on our families and things, we just revert back to how we've always spoken.

What has he told you about Omar and his family?



Not much. You have to understand, he's struggling.

Because Omar is South African?

I don't think that's the reason. At least, it's not the main reason. Fathers always have a hard time watching their daughters leave the house, even if the groom is perfect for his daughter. I went through the same thing when my little girl got married. I had such a tight bond with my own daughter. She was only thirteen months when her brother was born, so my wife had to tend to her brother and because of that, I took care of my daughter and established an incredible bond. I think I spent more time with her than most fathers. It was so difficult to watch her leave the house. I know that Soraya is Gafoor's little girl. They also have quite a bond and he can't deal with another man coming between that. It has nothing to do with Omar.

Have you given him advice?

I've told him a lot of things. And every time I tell him something, it sounds like a ridiculous platitude. I tell him it'll be ok. That she'll always be his little girl. That Omar is a good guy. That this is just a part of life. But I know it doesn't help. He's already missing Soraya even though she hasn't left yet.

Did you ever get over it?

I did. Life just goes on and we all adjust. Now my little girl has her own little girl. I have four grandkids. Life doesn't give me time to dwell. The same will happen with Gafoor. Everything is going to start changing. He's an adventurer, he'll love it.

Adventurer?

Oh yes. Since he was a child, he would talk about travelling the world and living abroad. He had that personality. He always wanted to try things and was very daring. I'm really not surprised he moved to Canada. He's visited so many countries. I just always hoped that when he was done with his adventures, he'd move back home. But now, I don't think that's going to happen.

You never know what the future holds.

The minute he becomes a grandfather, Canada will be home.

Interview, 10 May 2004, morning: Faatima, Jehaan, Ilhaam (Raania's sisters, the bride's aunts)

Hello again. Sorry we cut the last interview so short. Welcome back, ladies.

They say hello and ask how you are. They also ask where the other guy is. Wait, what other guy? Was there a different translator before me?

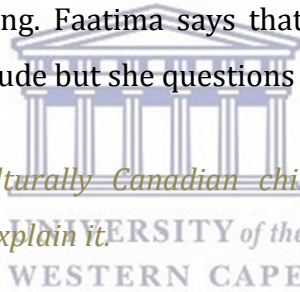
Yes. We felt that he was ... better suited working on other projects. He left out too many details of their speech. How do you like Canada?

They say they love it. This is Faatima's first time out of Egypt. They are all very excited. Both for the wedding and being in Canada.

The last time we spoke, you were saying that Soraya was a lot like Jehaan. That she was feisty.

Jehaan says yes that when she was young she also pushed the boundaries. She wanted to experience everything. Faatima says that some girls are just like that. She's never seen Soraya being rude but she questions everything.

Do you think that maybe culturally Canadian children are taught to question authority? Perhaps that would explain it.



Maybe. Or maybe she takes after her Aunty Jehaan. These sisters all seem really giddy.

It seems so. Tell them that. That they seem really giddy.

Faatima says they're so excited for the wedding. She's asking exactly why it's being filmed. She says she watches documentaries but can't imagine who would find their family interesting.

Americans love to learn about new cultures. It's known as the melting pot of the world. I understand that you all met Omar.

Faatima says yes. He's quite handsome. They say they were very surprised that he was white-ish.

She said white-ish?

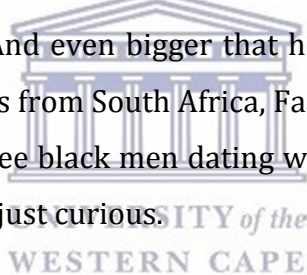
Yes. Or like-white.

What were you expecting?

They weren't sure. Someone named Raania called Faatima --- who's Raania?

Raania is Soraya's mother and their sister. Keep translating.

So Raania called Faatima as soon as Omar came to the house. It was big news that a boy wanted to marry Soraya. And even bigger that he wasn't Egyptian, or even an Arab. When she said that he was from South Africa, Faatima asked if he was black. In American movies, you always see black men dating white women. She says it didn't matter if he was black, she was just curious.



What did she say?

She said that she said that he wasn't black.

Can you say that again without using so many pronouns?

Faatima said that Raania said that Omar wasn't black.

I see.

Faatima says that he's such a polite boy. Wait, she corrected herself. A polite young man. She told him that his entire family must visit Cairo.

Do you see a lot of cultural similarities between Egyptians and South Africans? After all, you are all Africans.

Jehaan says that a North African and Sub-Saharan African might as well be from different planets. Faatima says that it's not that bad. She says you have to understand that North Africans are mostly Arabs and are different culturally. Even in North Africa they are different. Look at a Libyan and an Egyptian. We speak different; we eat different. We act different. We are just different. Plus we speak a different language compared to them.

But you are all the same religion.

They all say yes.

Thank you for translating them all nodding.

Ilhaam says that she was surprised how religious they are. They all went to a mosque in Detroit in America on Friday for Jumma. The Imam there is South African so it was quite interesting. We had lunch with him after. And the Imam could speak Arabic.

That must have been a treat for you all. As I understand it, different regions in the Middle East speak different dialects. Did the Imam have trouble understanding you?

Faatima says not at all. Everyone understands the Egyptians. The Egyptian language and culture are exported throughout the Middle East. Their movies especially. Ilhaam says their movies are comparable to both Hollywood or Bollywood. Because of this, everyone understands us. And our culture influences the entire Middle East. Soraya's family will have a strong influence on Omar.

I see. I thought culturally the husband was the biggest influence on the family. Don't translate that.

Interview, 10 May 2004, afternoon: Aunty Liema (*the groom's aunt*)

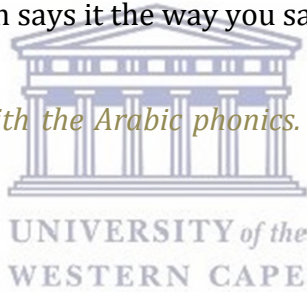
So what should I call you? Mrs. Daniels? Aunty Liema? Liema?

No, my darling, anything is fine with me. My full name is Galiema Daniels. Everyone just calls me Liema.

Galiema. What an exotic name.

I must say nobody in Cape Town says it the way you say it.

I've been told that I struggle with the Arabic phonics. So I'll stick with Liema. Aunty Liema then?



Or Tiety Liema?

Titty?

Yes, it means big sister.

I think in North America, Aunty is better. So I'll call you Liema?

....

Or ---

It's ok, you can call me Liema.

Liema it is. Are you enjoying your stay in Canada?

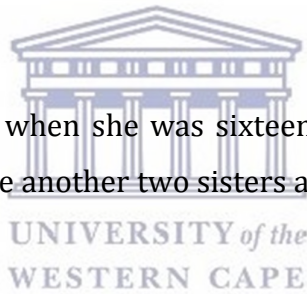
Yes. And let me just say I am so honoured to be here in Canada with the beautiful Canadian people. You have such a beautiful country here and I'm loving being a guest.

Very well said. Thank you. Although, I am American. So tell me, you are Omar's father's sister, correct?

Yes, I'm Sedick's sister. I have a special bond with Sedick. I was eighteen when he was born. I'm his father's oldest sister and he's the youngest son. I was feeding him and changing his nappies since I can remember.

Omar or his father, Sedick?

Both. My mommy got married when she was sixteen and had me at eighteen and Sedick at thirty six. We also have another two sisters and two brothers younger than me. Sedick was a *laatlammetjie*.



Lat lamerky?

Yes. I love how you pronounce our words. It means a late child, or should I say a surprise package. And what a surprise. Poor Mommy was so tired with the others, that I was the one changing his nappies and taking care of him. Remember there were no washing machines and dishwashers back then.

So you were a big sister and a mother figure to Sedick?

Oh yes. I loved him more like a son than a brother. I still think of him as my little boy. I cannot believe his son is now getting married. It's always a reminder of how the years have passed.

And how is your relationship with Omar?

He's a good boy. A bit naughty. Sometimes I think that Sedick was too lenient with him.

How has he been lenient?

Maybe it's Omar's whole generation. They just seem more rude. If Omar's father was ever rude to me, I would give him a *smack*. Through his face. In front of people. Now, the kids are just rude. I remember when Omar was a boy, he asked me to buy this *Jajoe* toy.

What's a Jajoe?

It took me a while to realize he was saying G.I. Joe. My goodness, when I saw the price, I thought I must be mad to spend so much. So I told him *no*. Then he asked me *why*. And then again. When he asked me for a third time I gave him a smack. The nerve! Can you imagine Sedick got mad at *me* and not Omar?

You feel you were just trying to discipline the boy?

Exactly. It makes me scared because now Omar is going to have his own kids with Soraya and he'll have to discipline his own children. And we don't know if Soraya's family is also lenient. That's what I find. The people who must discipline children are now more afraid than the children. Let me tell you something, the last Eid that Omar was in Cape Town, Omar came to visit the family with his *friend*. I still get angry when I think about it. Now in Cape Town, on Eid, you visit all your family. So if you bring a girl, then it's a big deal. This girlie had some nerve. She comes to the family wearing a little mini skirt that came all the way up to here. And a tiny top with strings over her shoulders. And to top it off, she was wearing a doekie.

Doekie?

A scarf.

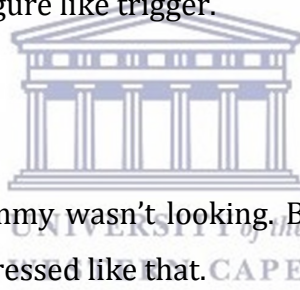
And wearing it like a hijab?

Yes. Now how stupid is it have your legs showing past your knees and then wear a scarf to cover your hair. That's just stupid. She's making a mockery. I wanted to ask her if her mother had too little material for a whole skirt.

So you weren't impressed.

No, not at all. It's not just that she didn't dressed right. I was young once too. As we used to say back then, I had a figure like trigger.

That's a new one for me. I like it.



I also tried my luck when Mommy wasn't looking. But the nerve this girlie has to come to the house on Eid day dressed like that.

So what happened?

She came to say *slamat*. and when she came in to kiss me on the cheek, I gave her a dirty look.

And then?

She froze. She didn't know where to look.

That must have been some look. So what happened next?

So she's standing there with a mouth full of teeth and I asked her, "Is this now how you come to people's houses on Eid? You must be ashamed of yourself?" And nogal to our house. I got up and I just walked out.

Where did you go?

Straight to the phone I went. I phoned my neighbor who's friends with her mommy.

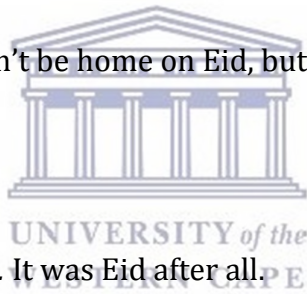
Wow.

And I called her mommy. My blood was boiling.

Wow.

I was afraid her mommy wouldn't be home on Eid, but she answered.

What did you say?



I started by saying *Eid Mubarak*. It was Eid after all.

And then?

I explained who I was. I started to say that her daughter was at our house greeting, and just as I'm talking to her Teela came into the room. She was listening and begging me to hang up the phone. She started pulling on my arm. Teela was so embarrassed she kept begging. I know I was embarrassing Omar and Teela. Do you think I cared? They needed to be embarrassed. So I told the girlie's mommy that when she comes to our family, especially on Eid, she must dress proper.

Incredible. And this was Eid day?

Yes.

Was the mother angry?

No, she just kept quiet.

She was probably in shock.

Or maybe she was taught to treat your elders with respect.

Fascinating.

It's how I was raised. When I see something wrong, I say it.

And with Soraya? Does anything need to be said?

No, not with Soraya. Not yet.



Interview, 11 May 2004, afternoon: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

So Aunt Liema asked you to call her just Liema? Wow, you must really have charmed her.

We got on like a house on fire.

Oh this is too funny.

She's quite an excitable old lady. She told me the most interesting Eid story.

Which one? There are many.

Really? She told me about Omar bringing home a girl and then Aunt Liema just losing it.

Oh yes. When Malika came over. That was crazy.

What happened afterwards. Omar and Aunt Liema still seem very close.

Yeah. The whole thing was unnecessary from the beginning. Let's start with the fact that Malika should have known to wear something better before she came to the house.

I notice that you're wearing a scarf but it's around your shoulders, not covering your hair.

It's on my head when Aunt Liema is around. It's a way of showing respect. Otherwise you seem outright defiant. But to be fair, I don't think Malika was defiant so much as she was a bit duh.



You didn't like her? Did you know her well?

She was ok. We were kinda friends. We were actually in the same class. She was one of the Revlon girls. That's what we called the girls who used to wear makeup to school every day and whose hair was always perfect and would wear perfect clothes. She could have a two-hour conversation about makeup.

And Omar liked her.

I guess. She looks really good in all that makeup. I teased him that if he married her, she'll look completely different the next morning. But he decided to bring her home, on Eid no less. He really should have prepped her better.

Was Omar upset over all of this?

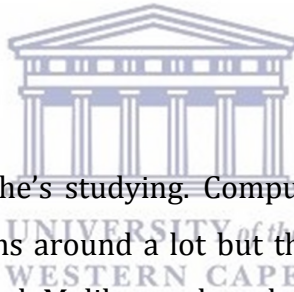
Oh yes. He swore he'd never visit Aunt Liema and that our family was crazy and judgmental. He was really upset and a bit embarrassed. But I had a long chat with

him, tried to sooth things. I told him that he still doesn't really understand our family. You see, our family loves you *to death*. It's just how we are. We're in each other's lives, in each other's kitchens, living rooms, business. They were simply concerned about him and that's how they, Aunty Liema in particular, expressed it. That's how we express everything, we overreact. And I remind him that he's not immune from the overreaction gene. We got into an argument once and we both can't even remember what it was about. But he didn't speak to me for two months. Keep in mind that we were in the same class and we hang out every weekend.

So whatever happened to Malika?

They went out for a while actually. But it ended. She was a nice girl but they really weren't a good match.

Why not?



Omar is driven. Look at what he's studying. Computer Engineering. Even in high school he was driven. He clowns around a lot but that's not really who he is. He's someone who is going to succeed. Malika on the other hand, she was --- I guess the best word would be *frivolous*. She's kind of just floating through life. You could see it even back then. We have friends in common and I still hear about her. She hasn't changed. She's probably gonna marry some rich guy who's going to take care of her.

Then maybe she and Omar would be a good fit. Opposites attract.

No. They were *too* opposite. I always used to wonder what they would talk about. Omar talks about ideas and politics. She just couldn't keep up. It's not that I don't like her. Really. It's just that they couldn't have a meaningful conversation.

I see. You've spent more time with Soraya now. How are you guys getting along?

We're great. She's showing me everything in Windsor. We walked along the sculpture garden, went to different restaurants, went shopping. She even showed me around her campus.

Are you still concerned about her and Omar.

I told you it wasn't a concern. And it wasn't even about her. It was barely an observation. Just that her daddy didn't seem that thrilled with the wedding. Please, let's not make it a thing.

Of course. Let's change gears for a second. Omar dated a girl named Reema. Have you met her?

Why are you asking about Reema?



I just found it odd that she and her family was on the guest list.

How did you see the guest list? I haven't seen the guest list.

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We actually had cameras and microphones in the dining room while they were drawing up the list. We've even interviewed her.

Oh, ok. Well that's a bit of a touchy subject. So to answer your question, yes, I did meet her. I've actually been friends with her for a few years. When Omar and she started dating he used to tell me all about her on chat.

Chat?

MSN. So eventually I said I wanted to meet her so Omar, Reema, and me had a group chat and soon after, she added me and we've been chatting since. Now we also keep in touch on MySpace so I think I know her even better.

And when they broke up?

Well, we kind of started becoming friends independently of Omar. So we still chat.

That's interesting. So you two get along?

Yes. Not at first though. I think she was really defensive at first because she was --- I dunno --- it's hard to explain. She wasn't very real. We still chatted because we both had Omar in common. It took a while, but we eventually became pretty close. As close as you can get to someone chatting to them on a computer I guess. Then Omar and her broke up and we kept chatting.

Have you met her in person.

I did. Her family has a Lebanese restaurant and they invited me to have dinner. It was a bit strange to meet someone for the first time that you've been chatting with for years. We hugged like we were long last friends. It was pretty funny.

So you had a good time?

Oh, yes. And the food was *amazing*. We have a few Lebanese places in Cape Town but they are mostly fast food, like shawarmas and stuff. There's a sit-down restaurant in Camps Bay, right by the beach, but the food is pretty mediocre. But the food at Reema's family's place was out of this world. And her family was so nice. She has two sisters and a brother. One of the sisters and the brother were working at the restaurant so only Reema, the other sister and her parents were sitting at the table. But the other sister and brother kept coming over to the table and talking so I got to know all of them. And I'm not sure, but I think the sisters were hinting that I should marry their brother. It was so funny.

Any potential there?

No, of course not. Lebanese guys are cute though. But I'm not here to meet guys.

Did you feel disloyal for having dinner with Reema?

Disloyal? To who? Omar?

Yes. And perhaps Soraya.

No. Firstly, Omar and Reema are on good terms. Secondly, Reema's dad and Uncle Sedick are like best friends and they are coming to the wedding. And thirdly, Reema and I have become very good friends independently of Omar. So I'm not doing anything disloyal to Omar or Soraya.

Sorry, my mistake.



Part 4. But What Do You Really Think?



The bridal shower

“Are you out of your tiny, little mind? What possessed you to hire these freaks?” Soraya is losing it.

“Hey! We’re just trying to make a living here. That’s uncalled for.” Although the dancer isn’t being spoken to directly, he feels the need to speak up. For the first time he feels silly dressed as a fireman.

Soraya turns and looks at him directly. “Listen, stripper---“

“I have a name.”

“Ok, what’s your name?”

“Lance Inferno.”



Soraya glares right through him and the dancer’s bravado fades. “My name is Fred.”

“Listen to me, *Fred*. You and your buddy over there are not going to *perform* tonight. So get out of here before my aunt’s sons come home and they throw you out of here. Believe me, there’s gonna be trouble.”

“Don’t threaten me. We were paid to be here.”

“Just get out. And don’t touch anything when you leave.”

“Fuck you, lady. We’ll include a tip on the credit card for our troubles.” Fred and his partner start walking through the kitchen door towards the driveway.

Soraya turns to Kelly and Michelle. They've been friends since the first grade but for the first time, Soraya feels like she's looking at strangers. "I can't believe you two did this. Don't you have any sense? Do you know how embarrassing this is?"

Kelly just kept examining her feet. She understands that Soraya is upset, but she thinks: *come on*, hiring strippers as a gag at a bachelorette party is not the biggest deal in the world.

"Look, I'm sorry, Ray Ray," Kelly starts. "It really was only a joke."

Michelle tries to summon up the courage to back up Kelly, but just can't get past the lump in her throat.

"We don't do these kinds of things."



"Ray, this is not over the top for a bachelorette party."

"This is not a bachelorette party. This is a bridal shower. We give gifts, play games, dance a little and nibble on fancy sandwiches. We don't watch naked men rub up against my guests. Omar's family is here."

"Ok, look, I'm sorry. Let's not blow this out of proportion. No one is even going to know."

"What are you talking about? Omar's cousin Teela is here. And there are cameras. This is going to broadcast all over network television."

"Ok, but on the Education Network."

All three young women turn their heads and look towards the living room. The open plan kitchen and lounge give all of her guests sitting in the lounge a perfect view of everything that has just unfolded. The microphone above their heads went

unnoticed until now. The cameras are also aimed directly at them. Everyone is staring silently, except Omar's cousin, Teela, who is staring at her feet.

"Soraya, let's not let this ruin the night. Everyone is here, let's open the gifts and start the games." It is Maha. Always the voice of reason. She walks over to Soraya and takes her by the hand and guides her into the living room. "I have to admit, I snuck one of the sandwiches and they are exquisite. We have food, music, dancing ... tonight's going to be perfect."

Soraya smiles. This will only be aired after the wedding and who cares what people say after she's already married. Everything is ok. She has been saved.



Interview, 13 May 2004, morning: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

I don't even know why she's upset with me. I didn't say anything. And I'm not the one who hired strippers to the bridal shower to begin with.

Why do you think Soraya's upset with you?

Because she thinks I'm the one who told people that her friends hired those strippers. Gross.

Did you say anything?

NO! There were over thirty girls there. Any one of them could have said something. I mean, I spoke about it after everyone started to talk about it, obviously. But I'm not the one who originally told people. Besides which, you have to wonder about someone whose friends think it's ok to have strippers at a Muslim girl's bridal shower.

You know, she made such a big stink about Omar's bachelors party. That they can't have strippers or cigars or anything like that. I've known Omar my whole life, you don't have to tell him that. Then she goes out and has strippers.

I thought it was her friends who hired the performers and she wasn't aware. And when she found out, she put a stop to it immediately.

You know what I mean. She had strippers *there*. And plus, what kind of friends does she have that they would do this. Do you know how people are talking in Cape Town? Omar is humiliated.

Have you spoken to Omar?

Yes, he's so upset.

With whom?

Everyone.

Interview, 14 May 2004, morning: Soraya (the bride)

I don't want to talk about it.

Talk about what?

You know damn well. This isn't fair. I didn't know they were going to do that. And now everyone is twisting the story so that it's like I wanted them there. And there's one person in particular who I thought was my friend, but she's twisting everything and making it sound worse than what it was.

For the record, I didn't allow anyone to dance or take off their clothes or anything like that. No boys were allowed to the party and when I saw what was going on, I kicked them out immediately. You know what really pisses me off? No one said anything while we were there. They left without saying anything. I told my friends that it wasn't cool, and then the bridal shower went on as per usual. I thought it was over.

Did Teela say anything at the time?

Not a peep. Now I hear she's telling everyone everything that happened at the bridal shower and making it sound like it was totally out of control. I can't wait for this to blow over.

You seemed to be getting along so well with Teela.

I thought Teela was cool. But I don't like how she's acting now. All of a sudden, she's acting all cold towards me and someone is telling Omar's family about my bridal shower, or at least a twisted version of my bridal shower. And she was the only member of Omar's family there.

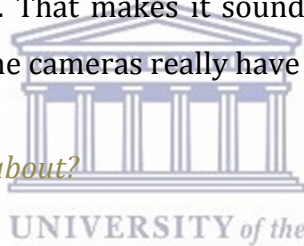
I guess she doesn't believe that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

No she doesn't.

...

Wait. Nothing really happened. That makes it sound like we really did something bad. We really didn't. And did the cameras really have to be at the bridal shower?

Is that really what you're upset about?



I guess not. This just sucks. Did you speak to Teela yet?

We've crossed paths in the hallways a few times.

How did she seem?

She seemed fine. Normal.

Of course she's fine. I don't think she's too upset that Omar and I are --- I don't even know what.

You may have a point. She doesn't seem upset.

Interview, 19 May 2004, afternoon: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

I'm really upset about this.

With whom?

Just the whole situation. People in Cape Town are going crazy asking me what's going on. And Omar still isn't talking.

So you haven't spoken to him?

I have spoken to him. But when I bring up the bridal shower, he shuts down.

Are you going to try to speak to Soraya?

Soraya's still too upset. Besides what would I say? *Um, sorry that everyone is mad at you for having strippers and humiliating Omar.* I mean seriously, I don't even know what I'd say. And she somehow twisted things in her mind so now she's somehow upset with me. I'll give her some time to straighten things out in her mind.

It must be upsetting that she kind of blames you for everything?

She blames me? For what? I didn't hire the strippers. I'm not the one with idiot friends. What did I do?

I don't blame you. But maybe she feels that you are the reason everyone is upset with her.

Everyone is upset with her ... because of her bridal shower. Which she and her idiot friends organized. I simply attended. The way she's acting, it makes it impossible to help her.

Interview, 19 May 2004, evening: Aunty Liema (*the groom's aunt*)

We didn't send Omar to Canada to come home with some alley-cat. What kind of people bring men to bridal shower to fucking take off their clothes? What kind of *gemors* is this?

Ge-what?

Gemors. It means a mess. But a beeg mess. The family doesn't want him to marry this girl. We are a decent family. We don't want people like that.

Is it really that serious?

Yes. You see, you don't understand. We are not Americans. We don't do such things. How is this girl now going to raise their children? With strippers in the house? If Omar wants to get married, that's fine. Then he can go to a nice family and bring home a nice girlie. He's *mos* a handsome boy. *Met sy goeie hare and mooie gesig.*

What does that mean?

You know, he's handsome. And has nice hair. You know his granddaddy was German.

Um, ok.

We're also a very prominent family in Cape Town. I already see this boy is changing. He's already beginning to sound like an American. No, I don't think he should marry this alley-cat. He must come home now. It's time. You know, his parents brought him to Canada to keep him away from bad influences in Cape Town. But now I see it's worse in Canada. Do you know he wanted to marry a girl in Cape Town who was involved with drugs? And whose ex-boyfriend was in a gang. That's why they brought him here. And how does he thank his family? He trades in the drugs for

strippers. *Sies!* You know I don't like to talk, but this family didn't raise this girl properly.

I didn't know any of this. His ex-girlfriend was a drug-addict? And her ex-boyfriend was a gangster?

Yes! For our family, it was like a smack in the face. My heart broke for Omar's mother. And now he brings this new girl home with the strippers. Why does he choose these girls. I can't even say what I want to say?

Why not? Please don't hold back.

It is much easier to swear in Afrikaans. Believe me, I want to speak Afrikaans right now.

What do you think should happen now?



I think Soraya's father should give her a *goeie klap*.

I can guess what that means.

A good smack.

Will that achieve anything?

Probably not. Her father should have given her a lot of smacks growing up. But he's too busy telling everyone how great she is.

How do we go forward from here?

I don't know. But this I can say: we won't forget.

Interview, 21 May 2004, morning: Soraya (*the bride*)

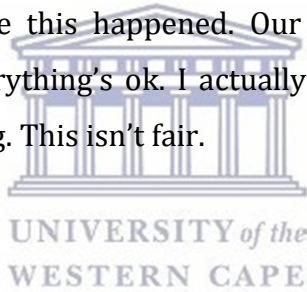
I really don't know what's going on. Omar won't speak to me. I don't want to speak to his family any more. I cannot believe he doesn't want to speak me.

Is the wedding still on?

HOW CAN IT NOT BE ON? We've been planning for months. Our families have flown in for this. I just can't believe this is happening. I'm sorry. I didn't think that was going to happen. And I stopped it.

How are you holding up?

I'm not. I've been crying since this happened. Our moms are still planning the wedding trying to act like everything's ok. I actually have to see his Aunty Liema who's helping with the planning. This isn't fair.



That must be awkward.

She acts like I don't exist. I'm being polite to her and she's acting like a child. You should be more mature if you're like a hundred years old.

What'll you do if the wedding is off?

The wedding is not off. That's just silly. I need to speak to Omar.

Interview, 21 May 2004, afternoon: Kelly, Michelle (*the bride's friends*)

Kelly: Look, we are so sorry that this happened.

Michelle: It was just a joke. We didn't think they'd over-react like this.

Kelly: And now they're mad at Soraya instead of us. If they want to be mad, then they should be mad at us. We did it.

Is Soraya speaking to you?

Kelly: Kind of. She's so mad at us.

Michelle: And like we said, we are so sorry. We really didn't think it was that big a deal.

Do you understand now why it was so important to them?

Kelly: We do. But it's too late now. We can't go back in time.

Michelle: Look, obviously it was inappropriate. But all jokes are inappropriate. That's what makes it a joke. It wouldn't be funny if they were fine with it. It's funny.

Michelle: Besides, girls watching a male stripper is different than guys watching a female stripper anyway.

How so?

Michelle: Well, you know ... Guys actually watch strippers because they want to get turned on. With girls it's different.

Kelly: Girls just find the whole thing hilarious.

Michelle: It would've just been a joke. They really want to make a big deal out of this? People want to stop the marriage over a joke?

How was the relationship before?

Kelly: With Soraya? We've been best friends since forever.

No, I mean with Soraya's parents.

Kelly: It's great. It's always been great.

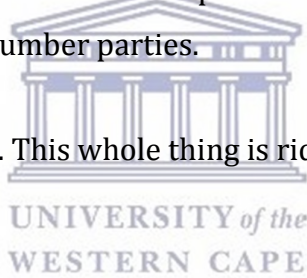
Michelle: We call her dad 'Uncle' for crying out loud. We've slept over at their house so many times.

And Soraya spends nights at your houses?

Michelle: Not exactly. Her dad doesn't let her sleep out.

Kelly: But it's not us. She's not allowed to sleep over anywhere. Even when we were kids, she couldn't stay over at slumber parties.

Michelle: But we're adults now. This whole thing is ridiculous.



Interview, 21 May 2004, Evening: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

Have you spoken to Soraya yet?

No.

Have you spoken to Kelly and Michelle?

Oh, you mean dumb and dumber? Those two idiots are ruining a wedding and they don't even get it.

I spoke to them. They seemed quite sorry.

They're not sorry. They start by saying how sorry they are and then they go and blame everything on us. If you're really sorry, you apologize and then shut your mouth. You don't apologize and then explain why it's not your fault. I swear, I have no idea why Soraya would be friends with those girls.

If you haven't spoken to them, how do you know they're acting like that?

Everyone is talking about it.

I spoke to Aunty Liema about it.

Oh lord. I'm too afraid to speak to her. What did she say?

She said a lot. She thinks Omar always picks troublemakers.

What? What troublemakers?



She said that he went out with a drug addict whose ex-boyfriend was a gangster.

Oh my God. She's talking about Malika.

Malika? The girl who came to Omar's house on Eid in a short skirt? You didn't describe her as a dangerous girl.

She wasn't. Oh my God. Not this again.

I'm confused.

This is so stupid. She wasn't a drug addict. And her ex wasn't a gangster. Her ex and Omar got into a stupid fight at school. And Omar kinda lost. He had a fat lip and some bruises on his face. And then everyone tried to break up the fight and Omar's friends and his friends pushed each other a bit. Then both parents had to come to

school and uncle Sedick warned the other boy's parents not to let them fight again. Then the story kept growing until it was a gang fight and that this boy was *Mongrel*.

Mongrel? That's very offensive.

It's a gang in Cape Town. And believe me, he's not part of any gang and there was no gang fight. The whole thing was so stupid.

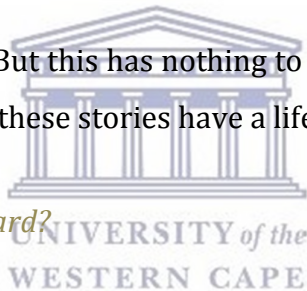
And the drug-addict comment?

Gangs usually deal drugs. So the story just kept going.

So Malika doesn't use drugs?

How would I know? I doubt it. But this has nothing to do with Omar and Soraya and the wedding. It just shows how these stories have a life of their own.

Is their wedding still going forward?



Look, I'm pretty sure Omar will come around. I think he's just embarrassed. It's the aunties. They won't let this go and they're just harassing him. They won't let him forget it.

Interview, 22 May 2004, morning: Reema (*the groom's ex-girlfriend*)

You know something, Soraya already hates me. I think it's best for me not to comment.

Interview, 23 May 2004, morning: Omar (*the groom*)

We haven't spoken in a while

No we haven't

Is the wedding still on?

Of course it is.

Do you want to give us your thoughts on the bridal shower?

No. Move on.

Are you ok with it now?

I'm not talking about it.



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I just want to give you the opportunity to -- wait, where are you going?

Interview, 23 May 2004, evening: Sedick (*the groom's father*)

Do you know what bothers me the most? It's not what happened at the bachelorette party. Although that was bad. It's how smug her family is. I'm fine with them being proud of being Egyptian. That's all well and good. But the way they made Omar *prove* that he was good enough for their Egyptian princess. It worked on my nerves. It never even occurred to them that maybe Soraya should prove to us that she's good enough for him. Their little princess throws a party with strippers and alcohol, and now they don't have much to say.

I didn't know they were drinking.

That's what everyone is saying. This family was looking down their nose at us since we met. Omar told me about the whole thing when he went there to propose. They made it clear that he wasn't their first choice and then they asked him all sorts of questions to see if he was good enough. It was like a job interview.

Don't all fathers do that with their daughters? They want the best for them.

Firstly, fathers do that with their sons too. But at least I gave them more respect than that. I didn't make them feel like they had to prove that they were good enough. And now this arrogant peacock's little girl goes and embarrasses everyone.

You know, it always happens. Always. When you look down at other people and judge them, then you always end up embarrassing yourself. Now Omar has to be the guy that marries the girl with the strippers. And do you think I want him to marry into a family that drinks?

I always got the impression they were more permissive than your family.

Exactly. This is going to be a perpetual problem for Omar.

I haven't actually seen them drink.

No, but everyone is saying there was alcohol at the shower.

Are you saying that where there's smoke, there's fire?

Yes. People say that for a reason.

What are you going to do?

There's nothing for me to do. Omar has to make the decision. But I'm very worried. I don't want him to be part of a family that doesn't accept him. He shouldn't have to

feel like he doesn't belong in his new family. He's going to spend a lot of time with them and it really isn't fair. I don't want him to have a problem for the rest of his life.

Can I make an observation?

Yes, go ahead.

It sounds like you're angry about the bridal shower but you seem genuinely concerned about Omar not being accepted.

I guess that's a good way to describe it. Or maybe they'd accept him but they would always think that he's *lucky* to be accepted. I come from a society where a lot of people felt like they were lucky to get whatever crumbs they got.

You're talking about Apartheid.



Yes. It wasn't just violence that was used to keep people of color in check. They also used psychological methods. You were bombarded with propaganda through the newspapers, TV, books and even at our schools. After a while, you *believed* that you were not as good. That you didn't belong. It starts to break you down. Maybe I'm very sensitive to this because of what I lived through, but I don't want Omar to feel that. I don't want him to feel like he's not good enough simply for being who he is. For what he was born into.

Could you be projecting?

Maybe. It's still a terrible feeling.

Ok. Before you go. I'm curious, what does Auntie Liema think should happen about the wedding?

She thinks Soraya should get a scolding, and maybe a hiding, but the wedding should still happen if Omar wants to go through with it.

I can actually picture her saying that.

Interview, 24 May 2004, Afternoon: Gafoor (*the groom's father*)

Firstly let me say for the record: No one was drinking at the bridal shower. And secondly, Soraya had nothing to do with those --- dancers. Her friends made a very bad judgment, and Soraya immediately rectified the situation and made them leave. This is getting entirely out of hand. People are spreading rumors that are not true.

Noted. I'll make sure the producer airs that segment.

Thank you.



Are you angry about the situation?

You know, I was. But I think I've calmed down a lot. I just want to get past it now. I was mad at Soraya for allowing this to happen. I always warned her to be careful of the company you keep.

You don't like Kelly and Michelle?

I don't know. Those girls have been in and out of this house since I can remember. I'm very surprised at them. They know what kind of people we are. I can't believe they thought that was ok.

Have you spoken to them since?

No. They haven't been to the house. But when I see them, I'm going to have a few words with them.

It sounds like the words will be harsh.

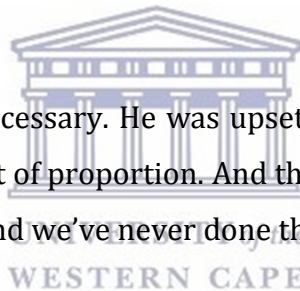
They probably won't. It's hard to be angry with kids. This whole thing is overblown. We're talking about girls who are twenty. They're still kids and people are judging my whole family based on a stupid joke.

Who have you spoken to about this?

A few people. I spoke to Sedick yesterday.

How did that go?

It didn't go great, but it was necessary. He was upset that this happened and I was upset that he was blowing it out of proportion. And then things started to get heated. We started raising our voices and we've never done that before.



I'm sorry to hear this.

After a while, it became clear that we weren't actually arguing about the bridal shower. A lot of things came up. I'm not sure where he got this idea, but he thinks we look down on him and his family.

Do you?

Of course not. I wish we spoke about this before instead of now when everyone is so pissed and people are making up stories.

Why do you think he thinks that?

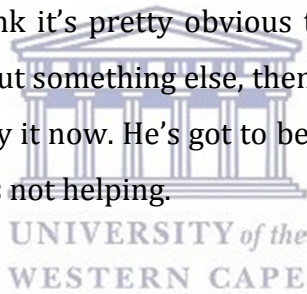
I think he misunderstands when I talk about Egypt. Of course I'm proud to be Egyptian. When I talk about it, it doesn't mean I think we're better than him or that Egyptians are better than South Africans or Cape Malays or whatever they are. I'm just proud. I explained this to him. I think we came to an understanding.

Do you think he's sensitive?

You know, I said that yesterday - that maybe he's being a bit too sensitive. He kind of flipped. If it wasn't so tense, it would have been funny. The way he denied being sensitive confirmed he's sensitive. I think he has to get over Apartheid.

I see. So where do we go from here?

That's really up to Omar. I think it's pretty obvious that this is not just about the bridal shower. If he's upset about something else, then let's talk about the real issue. If he wants to move on, then say it now. He's got to be a man and decide what to do. But him not talking to anyone is not helping.



That sounds harsh.

I don't mean it to be. I actually like Omar, but my daughter is hurting right now. I'm not saying she's completely innocent in all this, but this is not going to stand. She's my little girl.

Call me anytime

“I’m not sure why I’m calling you. But it’s not what you think.”

“What do I think?”

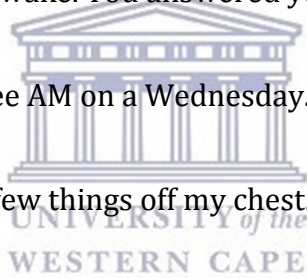
“You know, that I’m calling you for a reason.”

“Omar, you’re making less sense than usual. I’m very tired.”

“I’m sorry. I thought you were awake. You answered your phone on the third ring.”

“I’m generally not awake at three AM on a Wednesday. The phone woke me.”

“I’m sorry. Just needed to get a few things off my chest.”



“At three AM? Omar, this is rather unhealthy. You’re getting married in two weeks. I mean, assuming you get over your little meltdown.”

“It’s not a meltdown. I’m just thinking.”

“Omar, I don’t think you’re supposed to call your ex-girlfriend at three in the morning two weeks before your wedding. Especially when you and your fiancée are fighting.”

“I know. I’m sorry. Reema, I’m not sure who else I can speak to.”

“What about your crew? Speak to Yusuf or Shane.”

“Believe me I tried. Do you know what it’s like to try to get a guy to give you perspective? All Yusuf could muster was “Sucks to be you”. That’s literally what he said. “Sucks to be you.” And all Shane could muster was “Um. Those guys are useless.”

“Then what about Teela?”

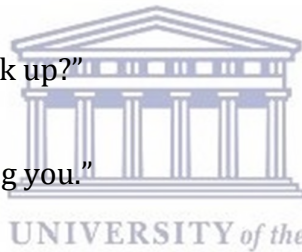
“I tried with her. But she’s being pulled in every direction by the family. I don’t think she’s being objective.”

“Omar, please don’t put me in this position. You cannot ask me to talk you into marrying another girl. It’s not fair.”

“I’m not asking you to do that.”

“Then are you calling me to hook up?”

“No. I don’t know why I’m calling you.”



“Well, if you can’t articulate it, maybe we should talk during normal office hours.”

“Very funny.”

“I’m not joking.”

“That’s really all you’re going to say to me?”

“Omar, I don’t know what you want me to say. I know we said we’ll always be there for each other, and I meant it when I said it, but it’s difficult to talk about you marrying another girl. And plus, your marrying *Soraya*. She’s one of *those* girls. She’s always looking down her nose at me.”

“It’s not like that. She really doesn’t.”

“I’m not an idiot. I know what she thinks of me.”

“Ok, she doesn’t like you. But it’s because we dated before.”

“It’s not that she doesn’t like me. It’s that she looks down on me. I don’t go to university. I date. I’m supposed to be wild. She had so much to say about me and now she has had strippers at her bridal shower. It always happens. If you judge someone or look down on someone, then something worse will happen to you. And you’re marrying that girl. Oh shit. And now my voice is quivering. I’m not crying, I’m just tired. Shit. Now I’m crying.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

“Why are you calling me Omar?”



“I don’t know. We always used to talk. After we broke up, we were still friends.”

“We were friends until you started seeing Soraya. Then you seemed to have lost my number.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Again with *I’m sorry*. If you can’t sleep, why aren’t you calling Soraya?”

“I can’t. I don’t know if I want to go through with it.”

“Oh I don’t believe this. I hate you for making me do this. Listen to me Omar. Soraya having strippers and booze at her party was downright embarrassing for everyone, including yourself. I’ll admit that at first I thought she got what she deserved for being so stuck-up, but I really started feeling sorry for her. You know how Muslims are, especially Arabs. They just don’t let these things go. But, come on, this really

isn't about that, is it? You're allowed to be embarrassed. Upset even. But you can't overreact like this. What is it really about?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure I can go through with this."

"I'm not going to tell you to go through with it. But don't not go through with it because of this stupid stripper thing. I mean, come on. We all have stupid friends. It could happen to any of us. Are you telling me you don't have old friends who, if you met them today, you wouldn't want to speak to? That's just part of living. Look at Yusuf and Shane. They are the biggest perverts on campus. And Mo is a drunk. And Muslim. And you still hang out with them."

"I guess."

"This is obviously not about the strippers. You're getting cold feet and you're using this as a way out. Think about it, Omar. Why are you getting cold feet?"

"I don't know. I don't like her dad. And I don't like how they are so ethnocentric. I hate how she constantly talks about sociology and her own achievements."

"Although I enjoy the turn this conversation has taken, it's not helpful. Please don't try to balance it out by saying all the things you like about her, because I'll hang up the phone right now."

"I won't"

"You basically have to decide - do you want to marry her. Don't cloud it with what happened at the bridal shower because, let's face it, it's not like she's gonna have one every month."

"You're right. I'm being ridiculous. I have to speak to her."

“Well, glad that I can help.”

“I’m sorry.”

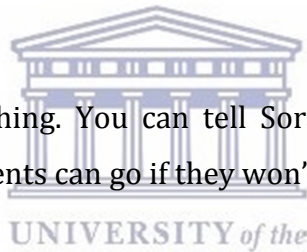
“If you say sorry one more time, I’m going to reach through the phone and smack you.”

“I’m --- Um, thanks. You’ve really been a great friend.”

“Well, you’ve been a shitty friend. I hate you for putting me in this position. This really is the last time. From now on when you can’t sleep, you call Soraya. I’m not going to be here for you anymore.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“I don’t want you to say anything. You can tell Soraya not to worry, I won’t be coming to the wedding. My parents can go if they won’t, but I’m not.”



“Please don’t say that. It’ll mean a lot to me if you come.”

“Seriously Omar. I’m not coming.”

“Maybe you’ll change your mind after ---“

“I’m not coming. Look, I hope you end up happy, Omar. Even if it is with that bitch.”

“Don’t call her that.”

“Fine. So go call her. I’m going back to sleep. Good-bye, Omar.”

“Bye.”

Interview, 26 May 2004, morning: Soraya (*the bride*)

I think we're going to be stronger for it. We've come to an understanding and now we're closer. I think this is one of those experiences where if you can make it through, you really grow as a couple.

What exactly happened?

You mean after the bridal shower. I don't know where to begin. Ok, so you know what happened that night. I thought it was all handled because I didn't let anything happen. So the bridal shower continued and everyone had a good time. So the next day my mom comes into my room and freaks out telling me that people are saying that I had strippers. I tried to explain to my mom but she was so upset. Anyway, I'm sure you've heard most of it.



Some of it.

Well, everyone was twisting things. Everyone was talking about the two strippers that Kelly and Michelle brought, but they conveniently leave out the fact that I sent them away and they didn't perform or anything.

Some people love to start trouble.

Exactly. But the worst thing is that Omar wouldn't speak to me. He stopped meeting me on campus and wouldn't even pick up the phone. I had no idea what people were telling him. I really started to worry that he didn't want to get married. Nobody was telling me anything. And I think Teela was making things worse. I thought Teela and I were going to be friends.

Anyway, I really didn't know what to do. My parents were humiliated. I was crying all the time.

So what happened?

I don't know. Yesterday, Omar just called me up and asked how my exams went.

How did they go?

All of my courses this year are research-based courses. I don't have any exams. But at least we were talking again. I apologized to him profusely.

Do you think he deserved an apology? You didn't do anything wrong.

It doesn't really matter. He was hurt. I think males have a pretty fragile ego. Please don't air that last part.

We won't. How are things with his family?

It's getting better I suppose. At the end of the day, I'm going to have to spend a lot of time with all of them. From what I hear, Teela actually told Omar that he has to speak to me. So even if Teela did make trouble at first, at least she eventually had my back in her own way at the end. There's no point in holding on to a grudge.

And Kelly and Michelle

That's a tough one. I really don't know how close we are going to be after we get married. Omar hates them. Before all this, he just disliked them. But now, he really hates them. And to be honest, I'm beginning to think we're not as close as we used to be. I'm not sure they get me.

It's weird, I've known both of them since kindergarten. I've known them for longer than anyone except my family. We went to the same primary school, high school, and now we're at the same university. But this isn't the first time when they just don't get me. I've had friends who told me that no matter how close you are to

people, if you're Muslim, there will be some things that non-Muslims simply won't understand.

Do you believe that?

I'm really not sure. I don't want to think about that right now.

How's Aunty Liema?

You know, I think she's beginning to warm up to me. Look, I'm not stupid, I know she would have loved Omar to marry some Capetonian girl and have Capetonian babies, but I think she's beginning to accept me. I think she sees that I'll make Omar happy. The truth is, even though she can be hard on me, it's because she loves Omar so much. She just wants what's best for him. When I remind myself of that, I actually feel affection for her.



She seemed to be very upset with you regarding the bridal shower.

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I know. But I think she's getting over it. Why, did she say anything?

I'm not supposed to say.

Well, like I said, it's ok. She was upset, but I think she sees me part of the family now.

She referred to you as an alley-cat.

She said *what?* Where the fuck does she get off? I can't believe she said that. You know something, Omar's had numerous ex-girlfriends. Before Omar, I'd never even been on a date. All those Cape Town girls start dating when they're like twelve. I can't stand that old fossil.

I shouldn't have said anything.

Interview, 27 May 2004: Teela (*the groom's cousin*)

So it looks like the wedding is back on track.

It does look like it. I spoke to Omar and told him that he couldn't just avoid everyone, he had to talk to people, especially Soraya.

So you encouraged him to work things out?

Not exactly. I told him he had to speak to her and make a decision. You can't have people wondering if the wedding is still on. But I knew he would work things out with her. Omar is not a *single* guy if you know what I mean. He doesn't like to be alone. I know he may not say he loves her, but I still think he does.

Why have you never asked him? Are you afraid of the answer?

I'm not afraid. I just don't need to ask.

So you think they're a good match?

I never said that. Look, they are very different. Her family is a bit wild.

Wild? I think she thinks Capetonians are wild. And promiscuous.

Did she say that? Look, I wasn't going to say anything, but that bridal shower was out of control before the strippers came there. The women got half-naked and were acting crazy.

Crazy?

Yes. The way that they were dancing with each other. And belly-dancing and stuff. Some of her aunties were in outfits that were basically just a bra and they were shaking their hips and belly-dancing. Aunties!

You weren't comfortable?

Not really. I wasn't going to say anything. If Aunty Liema was there, she would have had a heart attack.

Aunty Liema doesn't think much of Soraya, does she?

I wouldn't go that far. I think she's beginning to warm to her slowly. Aunty Liema is very old-fashioned. And she really wanted a traditional Cape Malay girl for him. But I think she'll eventually accept her.



Really? Because she referred to Soraya as an alley-cat.

Sorry, I shouldn't laugh. But that's exactly what Aunty Liema would say. It actually brings back memories. You know, back home, Eid is a very big deal. And everyone would spend so much time picking out the perfect Eid outfit. Then on Eid day, the youngsters would go and visit the uncles and aunties. Aunty Liema would always have a huge spread with all kinds of biscuits, trifle, pies, samoosas. But if any of the girls weren't wearing a scarf, or the dress was too high, or too tight, she would *skel* and throw them out of the house.

Skel?

It means *yell*. But really enthusiastically *yell*.

Like with Malika.

Yes. But not just Malika. Omar and I have this one cousin who just can't dress properly. Her skirts are always too short and her makeup is always too thick. The scarves she uses to cover her hair are the size of tissue and is usually around her neck instead of on her head. Anyway, Aunty Liema would always *skel* and throw her out of the house. She always referred to her as an *alley-cat*. Do me a favor. Please don't tell Soraya that Aunty Liema called her an alley-cat. Soraya won't understand that Aunty Liema even calls her own nieces that. It doesn't mean she doesn't love you. If Soraya heard, it would just cause trouble.

Don't worry, I won't tell her.



Part 5. Last Impressions



What a difference a few years make ...

“Soraya, you cannot be serious. Are you still on this?”

“I’m just saying that we should consider it, Omar.”

“I don’t want to consider it. I can’t believe you want to do this. After what they put on TV about us?”

“Come on, we didn’t come off that bad. Besides, it’s just a follow-up interview. It’ll be fun.”



“They’ll twist it, Soraya. And they’ll make us look stupid.”

“I don’t think they will. We’ll be more careful this time. I’d think you’d *want* to do this. It’ll also give you the opportunity to clear the air if you think they weren’t fair---”

“Don’t do that. Don’t pretend you think this’ll be good for me. This is because of you. You’ll do anything to be on TV. I don’t know why you’re such an exhibitionist.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I mean it. It’s like when you put every pic of us up on Facebook. And you constantly update your status almost every day. It’s so exhibitionist. And by the way, I know about social media. I am the one who studied technology. I work in technology so I know what I’m talking about. Everyone is going to realize how unhealthy this Facebook fad is and nobody’s going to use it anymore, just like Myspace. Mark my words.”

“I don’t know why you’re calling me an exhibitionist. They also said things about me, but I didn’t take it so seriously. Overall, we came off pretty well.”

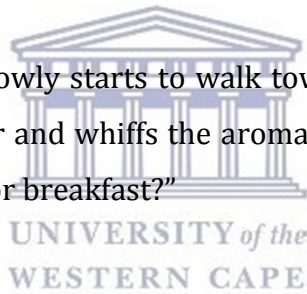
“They made us look so two-faced. It wasn’t like us at all. They blew up one or two things in our relationship and made it look like that’s what we were really like. I swear to God, you have got to get your exhibitionism under control. I’m afraid of what you’ll do for attention.”

“Hey. Don’t attack me because you didn’t like how we came off. I didn’t film it and nobody forced you to say all that stuff on camera. And you can see that the table isn’t even set yet. Can you help me please? My parents are gonna be here soon.”

“Fine.”

Omar gets off the couch and slowly starts to walk towards the kitchen. He surveys the food on the kitchen counter and whiffs the aromas lingering in the kitchen. “Oh my God. Are we having beans for breakfast?”

“It’s *fūl*. My dad loves it.”



“But for breakfast? How many times do we have to talk about this?”

“What’s your problem? It’s for my parents. Just have bread and jam if you don’t want it.”

Omar starts carting the food from the counter to the dining room table. With every trip, he notes that nothing in the feast was made with him in mind.

“Would it have been a crime to have something that I like? I do pay for this you know.”

“Seriously, Omar. Did you really just say that? Are you so mad about the possibility of another interview that you’re gonna start claiming all the stuff in the house. I just told you to consider it. I’m not forcing you to do anything. Besides, you don’t hear me complain when your mom brings home those sugar bombs for breakfast.”

“Sugar bombs? You mean koeksisters? You always thank my mom for them.”

“I’m polite. But those things are so unhealthy. I don’t see how anyone can eat them.”

“What are you talking about? No one forces you to eat four of them.”

“One time! I ate four one time!”

“You see why I don’t want to see those guys from the show. Would you like a camera in here right now?”

“I actually wouldn’t mind a camera in here. Maybe you’d be a bit nicer.”

“Oh, please. They’d only use the parts of me yelling and then put it on a loop.”

“Well, why yell in the first place? Look, Darren spoke to me personally and ---”

“Darren? How many conversations have you had with them? I spent so much time in the booth with that prick, and he pretty much stabbed me in the back. He acted like we were friends and everything was cool, then they only put in the uncomfortable things. The things that were just said in passing.”

“He promised me that they’d be fair. And if we’re honest, they didn’t make anything up. We did say all those things. And it’s just a follow up. They’re doing follow-ups with a few of their more successful couples.”

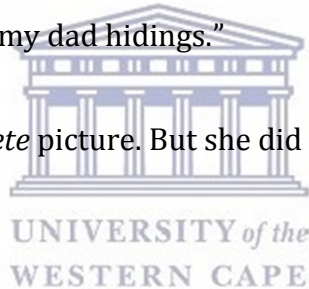
“They also assured us the last time. Then they made us look like fools. They made it look like we’re constantly lying to each other. Like we’re two-faced. And Aunty Liema just started talking to me again. They made her look like a buffoon.”

“No they didn’t. She came off very loveable. Like an old lady with old-fashioned, simple wisdom.”

“Simple? Aunty Liema is not simple. They only used footage of her yelling and complaining and being angry. They made her sound ignorant. They interviewed her for over an hour; funny how they didn’t think it was important to mention that she was the first coloured woman in Cape Town to run a major factory. Or that she freaking organized marches and protests against the South African government in the eighties. But none of that made it in. No, they just put in the parts of her yelling at you and talking about giving my dad hidings.”

“Look, maybe it wasn’t a *complete* picture. But she did yell at people.”

“Yeah, and why was that?”



“Are you really going to bring that up? We said we wouldn’t talk about that again.”

“I just don’t know why you want to speak to them again.”

“I’m just saying think about it. And don’t put the hot pots on the table! Use a placemat. You’re going to burn the table. You’re supposed to help me and you’re giving me more work.”

“Just pass me a placemat.”

“You can see me cooking. Just get it.”

“Ok, fine. Where is it?”

“You’ve lived here for almost two years, just like me.”

“So? I still don’t know where it is.”

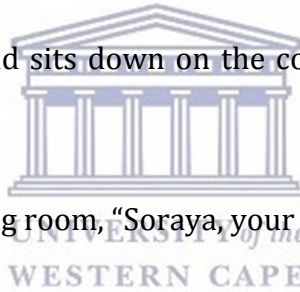
“Oh never mind. I’ll get it.”

Soraya stops stirring the pot, walks across the kitchen, opens a drawer and pulls out three placemats. She walks past Omar into the dining room and puts the placemats under the pots.

“Thanks for the help, Omar.”

“Whatever.”

Omar walks into the lounge and sits down on the couch and turns on the TV. The doorbell rings.



He calls to Soraya from the living room, “Soraya, your parents are here.”

“Oh my God, Omar. You can see I’m working in here. Can you get the door?”

“Is it possible for you to ask for something without a snide comment? I mean, seriously.”

Soraya storms into the living room from the kitchen and says in low, menacing voice, “My parents are waiting outside of the door. Can you just let them in?”

Omar gets up and walks to the door. He pauses, takes a deep breath, and then opens it.

“Assalaam-u-alaykum, Uncle. Please come inside,” says Omar, flashing his sparkling teeth as he beams at his in-laws.

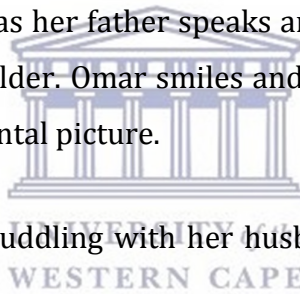
“Salaam, my boy. How are you?” Gus responds. They shake hands warmly.

“Salaam, Aunty,” Omar leans in and kisses his mother-in-law on the cheek, never releasing his smile. “Soraya will be here in a second.”

As if on cue, Soraya emerges from kitchen wearing a bright red apron which Omar notes Soraya wasn’t wearing while she was cooking. She smiles brightly and embraces her father then mother, “Assalaam-u-alaykum. Please, come in. How was the drive? How are you feeling?”

“The drive was fine. Only forty-five minutes. There was no traffic. And we’re both feeling fine”

Soraya retreats towards Omar as her father speaks and affectionately takes his arm and leans her head on his shoulder. Omar smiles and leans his head on top of hers, posing for Soraya’s parents’ mental picture.



Raania looks at her daughter cuddling with her husband. “Oh, you two are still so cute together.”

“Guilty. We are,” Soraya and Omar stare dreamily into each other’s eyes. “Now come, please. Sit down at the table. I just finished the *fūl*.”

“It’s my favorite,” adds Omar.

“Mine too,” says Gus.

Omar and Soraya lead their parents towards the dining table, holding hands. Soraya moves towards the kitchen and the young couple keep holding hands with their arms stretched out until the very last second.

“Oooohhhh. You two are so sweet.” Raania says. Gus simply quietly looks at the sickly sweet spectacle with his head slightly cocked. “Maybe next time we visit you’ll be expecting a little bundle of joy? Maybe you’re expecting already?”

“Oh mom, not yet. We’re still enjoying the honeymoon. But soon.” Soraya smiles as Omar puts his hand around her waist.

“Don’t wait too long. We want to see grandchildren while we’re still young enough to spoil them.”

“Mom will be the first person to know. Promise.”

“Raania,” interjects Gus. “Leave them be. Come now, I’m hungry. Let’s eat.”



“How did four people produce so many dirty dishes? It doesn’t make sense.”

“I still say we go to sleep and clean tomorrow morning.”

“Omar, please. I can’t sleep with a dirty kitchen.”

Soraya passes the plate she just sponged clean to Omar who rinses it, dries it and packs it in the drawer.

“You know, I think it would be easier if instead of packing each dish away after you dry it, you rather stack it and pack it away when you have a bigger pile.”

“Then I’d be bored between plates because you’re washing so slow.”

“Fine. I won’t give you any tips that’ll save you time. And it’s *slowly*.”

“Fine. By the way, why’d you put on that apron when your parents got here?”

“What do you mean? I was wearing the apron the whole time.”

“No you weren’t. I would have noticed.”

“I put on the apron way before they came.”

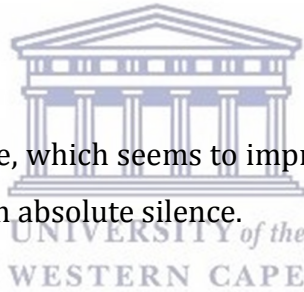
“What are you talking about? It was right before they came in.”

“No.”

“Ok, fine.”

“Fine.”

They start washing up in silence, which seems to improve their synchronicity. Omar has always felt uncomfortable in absolute silence.



“Oh yes, what do you want to do for our anniversary? It’s in two weeks,” says Omar.

“I know. What did you have in mind?”

“Well, we could go out, maybe to a restaurant; maybe go away for the weekend. Or we could have people over or something.”

They wash the dishes together in a quiet rhythm.

“Let’s have people over.”

“You sure?”

“It’ll be fun. The men on the balcony barbecuing, the women inside sipping tea.”

“Barbecuing is quite an effort. And it’s expensive.”

“Do you have to suck the fun out of everything?”

“I’m not. I’m just saying we can have a romantic evening together. Alone.”

“Omar, you’re just being lazy. Barbecuing isn’t *that* much work. Beside, we’re alone every night.”

“You’re right. I guess we are.”

Interview, 7 March 2007: Soraya, Omar (*the bride and groom*)



It’s been quite some time. I must say, you two look very charming together.

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Soraya: Thanks. And I have to say, staring at a camera in a room was pretty scary, but speaking in front of a studio audience is terrifying.

Wow. You’ll have to talk over the cheers. Like I told you before. Don’t be nervous and say whatever’s on your mind. You two were definitely one of our more popular subjects, so you’ll feature prominently in the final show. We’ll also take a few questions from the audience.

Soraya: Ok, I’m ready.

So right off the bat, how did you feel after watching your episode? Did you two watch it together?

Soraya: Yes. We watched it together. With our families and a few friends.

Wow. What was that like?

Soraya: It was very quiet. Nobody really knew what to say. I mean, it showed some difficult moments before the wedding. And it was all laid out for everyone to see. It was really quiet.

Omar: It was like a rollercoaster. It starts with everyone being really happy and excited. Then there are difficult moments, but at the end, we had a beautiful wedding.

The audience seemed to like that. It really was a beautiful wedding. Was it strange to see yourself months later?

Omar: Oh absolutely. You kind of get to see how other people see you. It's a real eye-opener.

Soraya: Yes, it really helps you grow as a person and as a couple.

Well you two obviously have grown as a couple. You've been holding hands and cuddling since you came in. Don't you think they're adorable, audience?

Soraya: Thanks, everyone.

Omar: Thanks.

Would you guys do it all over again?

Soraya: The marriage or the show?

Good one.

Omar: Yes to both.

Why?

Omar: Well, I guess it allowed us to share something special with everyone. It's like showing people your wedding album. You just love to share such a special moment. It's like sharing it with millions of people.

So what is a typical day like for you two? I know you don't have kids yet? Any announcements you want to make?

Soraya: Sorry, Darren, no baby announcements yet. I guess we're still enjoying the honeymoon. God, it's so embarrassing up here with everyone *aaww-ing*. Thanks, everyone.

They say that the first few years are the hardest. But you two seemed to have just sailed right through.

Omar: Yeah, I guess so. We don't really fight. I don't think we've had a big fight since we got married. We basically became one of those boring but happy couples. We watch movies at home and we go out to restaurants. We have people over now and again for dinner or coffee and cake.

Soraya: Yeah. We're always looking for reasons to be alone. We just enjoy each other's company.

That's just so sweet. Ok, let's take some questions from the audience. Ok, go ahead.

Audience member 1: *How have your lives changed since the documentary*

Soraya: Well, after it was first aired, it was weird because people would stop you in the street. Everyone would stare when we were in restaurants or we went shopping. It was so embarrassing. It was a bit difficult.

Omar: Yeah, Soraya hates so much attention. She's a naturally shy person. But it was only for a while. After a few months, people barely stared anymore. Now, everything is back to normal. We barely get recognized anymore.

Audience member 2: *Are you guys thinking of going on another show?*

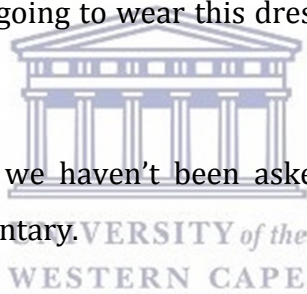
Soraya: Another show? I have no idea why anyone would want to watch us now. We've become just another boring couple.

Audience member 2: *Perhaps following your first pregnancy.*

I can speak to the execs at the Education Network. They'd love something like that.

Soraya: Oh my God. I'm never going to wear this dress ever again. Everyone seems to think I'm pregnant.

Omar: Thanks, everyone. But we haven't been asked and we're really not even thinking about another documentary.



Soraya: But we're not ruling it out.

Omar: But we're really not thinking about it.

Ok, we have time for one more question. Then we have Lula and Jean-Paul, another popular couple from last season, ready to come onto the stage.

Audience member 3: *Hi. I really enjoyed your documentary. There were some awkward moments in it. Especially with the bachelorette party.*

Soraya: Oh yes, we remember. And it wasn't a bachelorette party, it was a bridal shower. Not that matters now.

Audience member 3: Um, yes. So my question is: Do you think you were portrayed fairly?

...

Wow, that was a long pause. Do you have an answer?

Omar: Sorry, I'm just thinking about how to word this. So let me start by saying that we *were* treated fairly. We have no hard feelings or anything like that. And yes there were some difficult moments that made us --- I dunno --- cringe the first time we saw it, but now we actually laugh about it when we see it or if it comes up. We're not bitter about it or anything. We really don't fight about it or anything like that.

Soraya: It's almost like our inside joke. We always laugh about it. That's the thing. We're pretty authentic as it is, so seeing us camera doesn't really phase us. What you see is what you get.

Omar: Yeah, you really can't complain about how you're portrayed when they're just recording your own words. So, yeah, we have no trouble with how we were portrayed.

So you're both happy?

Soraya: Yes.

Omar: Absolutely.

Lovely.

end