

An excerpt from At Her Feet by Nadia Davids

There was this boy ... there always is. My friend Sarha's cousin, Nazeem. Anyway, his mother is one of those hectic Muslim mothers: possessive, controlling, thinks the sun shines out of her son's smelly bum. Auntie Kariema ... Cow! So there I was - passionate about this man, and Sarha assures me that he was "different". Unconventional. Didn't run with the herd. Played drums. I mean, people, we are not talking about a Halaal raver, a Cavendish-roaming Nikes-and-Spikes boy. So we're dating, going out, endless coffees, dagga, hip-hop parties, and after a few weeks and about a hundred hints, I suddenly realise that he's avoiding taking me home. He is avoiding introducing me to his mother. So I start thinking, okay, maybe it's the way I dress, or I'm too loud, or it's my piercings. And I ask him, and he avoids answering me, and I start to whine, "Nazeem, just tell me, just tell me what is it," and then I start to scream, "Nazeem, you better tell me and if you don't I'm going to kill you!" and then I start to cry not because I'm sad but 'cos I'm frustrated, "Why? Why?

Why?" And I keep nagging, "Why? Why? Why? Tell me," and then he shouts back in a rush of words that he prays he can take back for years after, "Okay, okay, dammit Ayesha. You're right. I can't take you home because your goddam hair is so kroes that my mother will think you are a Boesman and never that you're Muslim. She's totally bigoted, but it doesn't matter to me, so it shouldn't matter to you, so let's just go on with our relationship without my mother ... okay?" And while my body absorbed the emotional rocks thrown at it, my mind reeled around solutions. So I said, "Nazeem, are you telling me that you would take me home if my hair was straight?" He nodded yes, and I said, "Is that a promise?" Again, a promising nod.

So the next day, I went out and bought a wig. Yes, a blonde, long wig, so obvious in its theatricality that it was designed for Rapunzel. I called him and he had promised, so he had to take me home. And I had tea with a stunned Auntie Kariema, with my blonde wig that defied description, eating her pies saying, "*Kanala*, Auntie Kariema," and an hour later, with Nazeem still chewing his lip into a blood clot I ceremoniously broke up with him, declining<sup>37</sup> the lift he offered, "No thank you, it's started to rain, so *ek en my hare gaan huistoe*."