

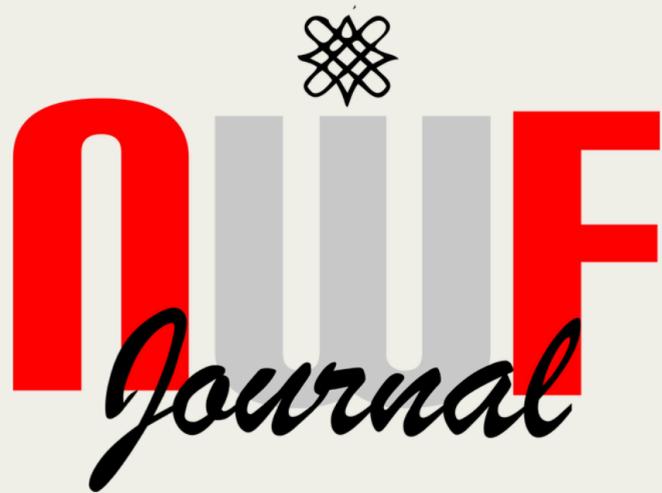
AREWA HEARTS & HALAL LOVE

NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE



MAYMUNATU BUKAR

CULTIVATING
CREATIVITY



NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE

a programme of the



funded by:



**OPEN ARTS DEVELOPMENT
FOUNDATION**

DURATION: APRIL - OCTOBER 2025

[WWW,NORTHERNWRITERSFORUM.NG](http://WWW.NORTHERNWRITERSFORUM.NG)

PUBLISHED BY *NWF JOURNAL*

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

© 2025 NWF Journal

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Copyright © 2025 by The Author.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The author have asserted their moral rights under applicable copyright laws to be identified as the author of this work.

PERMISSIONS

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher and the author,

NWF Journal. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the bounds of fair use should be sent to **info@nwfjournal.com.ng**

Cover Art

Victoria Ilemobayo Ojo

Layout & Design

Ibraheem Uthman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their endless love, prayers, and encouragement, and to my friends for their unwavering support throughout this journey.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Northern Narrat

ive Initiative for the mentorship opportunity that made Arewa Hearts and Halal Love possible. Your dedication to nurturing writers and amplifying Northern voices is invaluable, and I am honored to have been part of this journey.

To my mentor, Nana Sule, and my colleagues in the program-thank you for your guidance, insight, and encouragement. Your commitment to excellence has shaped both my writing and my confidence as a storyteller.

And finally, to every reader who picks up this chapbook-may you find resonance, beauty, and reflection within these pages.

DEDICATION

For my Wattpad family, whose belief in my words keeps me writing.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This prose is a sweet and hopeful collection of three love stories, each gently paced and taking us into a world where women, men, boundaries, faith and desire intertwine. From a young ambitious woman who enters into marriage with faith in the Almighty, to one who considers a proposal because the man came through her father, AREWA HEARTS AND HALAL LOVE comprises beautiful, soft tales of love from the North that offer a glimpse into the hearts and lives of young Muslim women navigating tradition, faith and love.

Testimony Odey

Author of "Uloma" and "Feathered"

CONTENTS

AKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
DEDICATION	V
EDITOR'S NOTE	VI
WHEN HE ASKED BABA FIRST	01
FROM NIQAB TO NIKKAH	06
THE SPACE IN BETWEEN	11

WHEN HE ASKED BABA FIRST

Amina's jaw tensed at the echo of footsteps matching hers. His voice scraped against her nerves—like nails clawing a chalkboard—grating and smug. He acted as if he had the right to her space.

Cars rushed past, punctuated by the occasional honk from impatient drivers. She picked up her pace, cursing the stretch of road that seemed longer today.

“...if you'd just give me your number.”

The man's voice oozed entitlement. Amina stiffened. Ignoring usually worked—but not with this one. He hovered, relentless. Like a fly you couldn't swat, one that always came back, buzzing louder the more you dismissed it.

Just a few more steps.

She hated that he was still behind her. Most of them gave up shortly after the turn from the main road. Her house sat tucked at the far end of the street, a distance she once appreciated for the privacy, now resented for the same reason.

The white gate came into view, unchanged since childhood. Its surface was patched from years of welding repairs, tired but dependable. As if on cue, it creaked open—her father's white Toyota pulling out.

She slipped through the gate just in time, the clang of it shutting behind her like a gavel. Let him yell. She was done entertaining pests.

Baba Magadi stood by the side, but she was too irritated to exchange their usual greetings. No teasing about his endless wives or his small army of children in the village.

She unclipped her hijab the moment she stepped inside, letting it fall to the floor beside her tote bag. The weight of the day clung to her skin. Slumping onto the sofa, she groaned. “I swear, I'm saving every kobo to get a car. I can't keep doing this.”

“And when will that be?” Bello's voice floated from the hallway. “In the next thirty years?”

She grabbed one of the many mismatched throw pillows and flung it at her brother's smug face. He caught it mid-air, one brow arched, wearing that smirk that made her want to throw something heavier.

"Why is your entire gender so dumb?" she snapped. "What is it about being ignored that's so hard to grasp? Gush..." She buried her face in another pillow. "And chivalry? Dead. They stop you on the road like you're some—some roadside snack they can price."

She narrowed her eyes at Bello. Maybe he was out there harassing girls too. Just for that thought, she hurled another pillow. This one hit squarely.

It wasn't even about the guy anymore. It was the pattern. The audacity. The entitlement. This was the nth time a boy had followed her. What happened to being a gentleman? Why stop a woman on the road as if she were a roadside snack—to ask for her number? It was disgusting. And disrespectful.

Fed up, Amina stood and walked past her scattered belongings, heading straight for the kitchen. The thick aroma of locust beans and palm oil smacked her in the face. She groaned. That could only mean one thing—Mama had made *tuwo*. Again.

She rummaged through the cupboard and picked a pot, carefully ignoring the one on the stove filled with the green, sticky soup she despised.

Ten minutes later, she sat with a steaming plate of noodles in front of her. Bello hovered, begging for two spoons.

She didn't budge. Seeing him reminded her of that guy outside, and it made her mood worse. No matter how whiny he got, she refused to share. Let him suffer.

Later that night, after dinner, the TV hummed in the background with the 9 o'clock news. Baba was glued to the screen while Mama sat beside him, punctuating the headlines with disapproving comments.

"Oh, this country has spoiled. Everything is in shambles. *Yau wannan, gobe wannan*—every day, it's a new story."

"That's what happens when the government stops serving the people and starts stuffing politicians' pockets," Baba muttered without looking away.

Amina barely heard them. She wasn't moved by the usual commentary on Nigeria's downfall. It was like background noise now—same tune, different day.

“Baba, when will the car be fixed? I'm tired of taking public transport to work.”

Her mother shot her a glare. “During our time, we used to walk over ten kilometers to school. No public transport. If you were lucky, you had a bicycle. But now, you have buses picking you up—you only walk a little and you're already complaining. The car won't be fixed. If public transport is too hard, don't go to work.”

Amina bit back a huff. Nigerian parents had a talent for glorifying and exaggerating their suffering. She was almost sure Mama's school had been just around the corner.

“Baba...” she whined.

“Few more days, Amina,” he replied, still focused on the television.

Amina closed her laptop with a soft sigh, her shoulders slumping as she leaned back. She glanced at the wall clock—time to go. She couldn't stay any longer. Not another moment in this building, with its buzzing lights and endless clicking keys. It had been a long day, and she felt it in her bones.

“Wait, let's go together,” her coworker Bilkisu said, catching up to her with an easy smile.

Amina nodded wordlessly.

They said goodbye to the Head of Department and stepped out of the lab, tugging off their coats as they walked toward the bus stop. The late afternoon air felt warmer than usual, filled with the scent of dust and fried street food. Bilkisu chatted beside her, words tumbling over each other, light and unbothered. Amina half-listened, her mind still foggy with numbers and files.

Her legs already ached at the thought of the walk home from the junction. “Few more days, Amina,” Baba had said—weeks ago. The words clung to her like heat. At this point, she wasn’t sure if the car would ever be fixed or if her father just needed her to stop asking.

A car honked nearby, drawing both their attention. A silver sedan pulled up, window rolling down to reveal a man in a crisp kaftan. His grin was too casual, too familiar.

“Yan mata...”

Amina barely glanced his way. She had no energy for this. It was catcalling—plain and simple. Dressed up in a kaftan and a smile, but it was the same old script. Still, Bilkisu’s expression brightened, her voice lifting.

“I could drop you off if you’d like. Where are you going?” the man asked.

Bilkisu turned to Amina, eyes wide with excitement. She wanted permission. Or maybe just validation.

Amina offered a small, polite smile—the kind that didn’t reach her eyes. “You can go. I’ll wait for the bus.”

And just like that, Bilkisu opened the door and stepped into the car of a man she didn’t know. No questions asked.

Amina blinked, too tired to even be surprised.

What happened to kunya? To the quiet dignity that used to guide women like a compass? When a man wouldn’t dare approach without standing before your elders—intentions clear, respect woven into every word.

There was a time when approach meant process. When sincerity wasn’t optional. When everything followed the path Islam had already lit.

Now?

Now it felt rushed. Stripped of meaning. Like something sacred had been replaced with casual convenience.

She lay on her bed, the only light in the room coming from her laptop screen. The faint hum of the laptop filled the quiet space. Too invested in the drama she was watching, she didn't realize someone had opened the door until a soft clearing of a throat broke her focus. "I didn't see you there, Mama," she said, blinking away the screen's glow.

Mama smiled gently and settled at the foot of the bed. She reached out, tugging Amina into a quiet, familiar closeness before speaking.

"About two weeks ago, a young man, Yusuf, came to your father seeking permission to court you. Baba looked into him—his background, his character—and the results came back satisfactory. He'll be coming to see you tomorrow." Her voice was warm but carried a hopeful weight. "I know you, Amina. Give him a chance."

Amina's lips curved into a tentative smile, the knot in her chest tightening but steadied by the respect he'd shown.

Of course, she'd give him a chance.

Because he asked Baba first.

FROM NIQAB TO NIKKAH

The mosque was filled with a buzzing crowd as men shuffled forward to personally congratulate the groom.

The wedding had been finalized. Haidar was married to Mubina.

The first time Haidar saw Mubina, his breath hitched. It was not the way she moved or how she was dressed that enticed him. It was her eyes that reminded him of a full moon on a dark night.

He could tell she was smiling behind her niqab. Her eyes were twinkling with mirth.

It was a Sunday. 6:00 p.m. The evening Islamiyya had just closed. His car had broken down. His mechanic wasn't picking up. And he was pissed. It had been just three days since he got the car back after it had spent four weeks at the mechanic's shop.

His phone pressed to his ear; he paced back and forth near where the car was parked. The mechanic was trying to explain, but he wasn't having it. It wasn't supposed to break down again. He didn't have the money for another repair.

That was when he heard her laughter.

Not loud. Not boisterous.

Soft and serene. Like a calling.

Rage forgotten, Haidar was transfixed.

"Oga, you dey hear me?" The mechanic's voice cut through, snapping him out of it.

"I'll call you back."

That was his mistake.

When he raised his head again, she was gone.

His gaze searched as far and wide as it could, but there was no trace of her.

The mechanic came twenty minutes later.

Haidar came back—same time—the next day. But she wasn't there.

Again and again, he returned.

Until three months passed.

He didn't know how to describe her to anyone. Large eyes that looked like the moon? Yeah, that didn't make sense.

But giving up wasn't an option. He had to see her again.

“Ba ka da aikin yi,” his friends had told him.

Even his sister thought he was crazy.

“What if she's ugly? I mean—you haven't even seen her face!”

He agreed. They were right.

But he didn't care.

Maybe he was crazy. Maybe he should give up, just like everyone kept telling him.

It had been months. There was no progress. People had even started to say maybe he saw a jinn.

His mother had given him Ganyan magarya to bathe with.

“Yana karya sihiri,” she had said.

But Haidar knew it wasn't black magic.

She was human.

Just as it was written in their fate—on his way back from work, exhausted—he had no plans of looking for her that day.

As if someone whispered to him—look—he turned away from the nagging man trying to sell him a new wiper in the hold-up.

That was when he saw her.

His heart skipped a beat. He'd found her.

She was trying to flag down a tricycle.

He jumped into action.

The traffic light had just turned green. He switched lanes, ignoring the curses from other drivers.

Now that he had seen her—he had no idea what to say.

Funny, how he had waited for this day for months.

“Lose the niqab. You're not going to find a husband clad in that every day.”

“At least wait until after you've gotten married to be a ninja. That's why you're still at home.”

“Don't you feel hot?”

Every tricycle she tried to flag down wasn't stopping. The sun was beating down, harsh—even though it was already late afternoon.

The sound of a car pulling up beside her drew her attention. A man, dressed impeccably in a kaftan, stepped out.

The car was white, with tinted windows.

“Assalamu alaikum. I can drop you off.”

Mubina might have been desperate—but not desperate enough to enter a stranger's car.

With tinted windows.

“Wa'alaikumsalam,” she replied to his greeting.

It wasn't right not to respond.

He offered again, and she politely declined. Thankfully, a tricycle stopped, and without looking back at the man, she hopped on and told the driver her location.

A week later, one of the street boys came in.

“*Ana sallama da* Mubina,” he said.

Everybody stopped what they were doing.

Her father's second wife broke the silence first with her laughter. “Are you sure that's who he said? Maybe it's another person. Go back and confirm.”

Mubina was seated in front of her room, the one she once shared with her mother. Now, it was only her.

Baba had traveled; the house was even more unbearable.

The boy came back a few minutes later. “He said it's Mubina.”

With all eyes on her, she wrapped up, wore her niqab, and went out.

It was the man from that day.

How did he know her house?

He made his intentions clear to her. That was the first time anyone had ever shown a romantic interest in her.

She didn't know what to say. So, she said nothing.

He finished talking, opened his car, brought out a leather bag, and handed it to her. “Here, this is for you.”

Mubina shook her head and said her goodbye.

If he thought she was strange, he didn't show it.

His name was Haidar. He was funny. Liked talking about his family. From his stories, they were close-knit. It was something she couldn't relate to. Haidar always came bearing gifts that she never accepted. She went to Faiza's house and told her about him. How he understood her and validated her feelings.

“What are you waiting for? Tell him to meet your father.”

But Mubina couldn't make a decision just like that.

She sought the help of the One whose decree is always right. He who knows the knowledge of the seen and unseen.

“Ya Allah, if he is good for me, make it happen. And if he is bad for me, replace him with one who is better.”

Baba came back from his trip unexpectedly and met Mubina with Haidar outside.

Haidar greeted Baba and Baba answered, assessing him from head to toe. His glance was strictly fixed on the car.

Mubina went back in, her heart racing and about to escape from her ribcage.

“Tell him to send his elders.” Was all Baba said.

Mubina was distraught. She knew he liked Tuwo and his mother was his best friend. But she didn't know him enough to spend the rest of her life with him, did she? She would put her trust in the One who overlooked everything—He who has knowledge of everything, even the black ant on the black stone in the depths of the night.

THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

3:00 AM

Hajara stirred. Her eyes fluttered open at the sound of water running in the bathroom. She closed them again, blindly tapping her bedside drawer until her fingers brushed her phone, bringing it to her face.

The brightness of the screen almost blinded her.

The door to the bathroom opened and Abdul walked out, water dripping down his forearms.

“Oh, good. You’re up.”

Without waiting for her response, he picked his prayer mat and laid it down to face the Qibla. Soon after, his melodious recitation filled the silence of the room.

She took in a deep breath and willed herself off the bed. The first splash of cold water on her face erased the last traces of sleep. By the time she stepped out, Abdul was already in sujood.

She picked up her own prayer mat and hijab and laid it behind him. The distance between them reminded her of the one that had been growing in silence for days now.

She emptied her mind and focused on her salah. At this hour—when the world was asleep—she let out all the words she couldn’t say out loud. The ones that scared her. The ones that overwhelmed her.

7:00 AM

“Bye. I’m leaving.”

The kiss Abdul gave her was half-hearted. Hollow. It lacked the tenderness she was used to.

How did they get here?

In the first four months of their marriage, she’d realized love wasn’t enough to sustain it. That the patience elders always emphasized wasn’t just lip service.

They were two years in now, and the young love they once shared seemed so far away. They'd been together for eight years. High school sweethearts, people would say.

But married life?

It wasn't the fairytale they'd painted.

Not anymore.

No long car rides. No weekly date nights.

It was a stack of unfinished conversations. Dodged truths. Emotions swept under the rug until they piled up, threatening to swallow her whole.

For a community that obsesses over marriage, no one really prepares you for what happens after the wedding. You're taught how to plan the event, not the life that comes after.

Instead of fussing over the guest list, the menu, the color palette—Hajara wished someone had sat her down and told her how to have hard conversations. How to listen without becoming defensive. How to accept fault without feeling small.

They told her, "No third parties."

But where was she supposed to turn?

Who would she explain to? That she was slowly losing herself. That she no longer recognized the man she married. That there was no "them" anymore—just a him and a her.

2:00 PM

The quiet hum of the refrigerator was her only companion as her fingers moved across the keyboard. Being a freelance writer had its perks, but working from home no longer held the appeal it once did. It left her with too much time. Too much space. In a house she once dreamt of turning into a home, but now felt like a tombstone.

After sending in her work for the week, Hajara looked around the living room, unsure of what to do next. This was usually when she started prepping for lunch. But she couldn't bring herself to do it. So, she curled up on the sofa and let her mind wander to a time not so long ago. A time that now felt like worlds away.

8:00 PM

“Aren’t you leaving yet?”

Abdul looked up from his computer. His coworker raised an eyebrow. “You’re the only one left, man. Go home to your wife.”

Abdul blinked. The office was quiet. All the cubicles were empty. He dragged a hand down his face and leaned back in his chair. He hadn’t even noticed the time.

It wasn’t just the workload—he was chasing a promotion. One that came with a raise. One that would let him finally afford the leather bag Hajara had once mentioned years ago. The one she had admired at the mall and walked away from without expecting him to remember.

She hadn’t asked for much. And maybe that was why he wanted to give her something that felt like more.

He didn’t want to come home empty-handed.

Everywhere was dark when he turned his key and pushed the door open. He tapped the switch by the door and the place came alive with light.

His eyes scanned the room.

Where was Hajara?

By now, she was usually at the dining table, her eyes glued to her laptop. Or curled up on the sofa, deep into one of her Korean dramas.

“Hajara?” he called.

Silence.

His chest tightened as he searched the kitchen. The bedrooms. The storeroom.

No sign of her.

Her phone was gone. So was the black hijab she always wore when going out.

He rang her.

No response. For a brief, heart-thudding moment, the thought struck him—maybe she's gone.

10:00PM

The sound of keys in the lock.

Abdul turned. She stepped in slowly, her hijab draped around her shoulders, her expression unreadable.

“Where were you?” His voice was harsher than he intended.

Hajara placed her keys on the table. “I needed air.”

He studied her. The way she avoided his gaze. The stiffness in her shoulders. She looked like someone who had been carrying too much alone.

“I didn't know where you were,” he said. “You didn't answer your phone.”

“You haven't exactly been talking to me lately either.”

The silence that followed was sharp. Heavy.

“I thought maybe...” he swallowed. “Maybe you left.”

Her brows furrowed for a second. “Would you have noticed if I did?”

His chest ached.

“I would,” he said. “I do.”

“I don't want this distance between us, Abdul,” she said, voice trembling. “I miss us. I miss you.”

He stepped closer, just a little. “I've been trying to get that promotion.”

Her eyes flicked to his.

“The leather bag,” he murmured. “The one you liked... I didn't forget. I wanted to give you something. Something that reminded you I still notice.”

She blinked repeatedly.

“You think a bag will fix what silence broke?”

“No,” he said quickly. “I just... I didn't realize how far I'd pulled away. I thought I was doing something for you. But I wasn't with you.”

Silence again.

Then she spoke, softer now. “I just needed you.”

“I’m sorry.”

Her brows lifted.

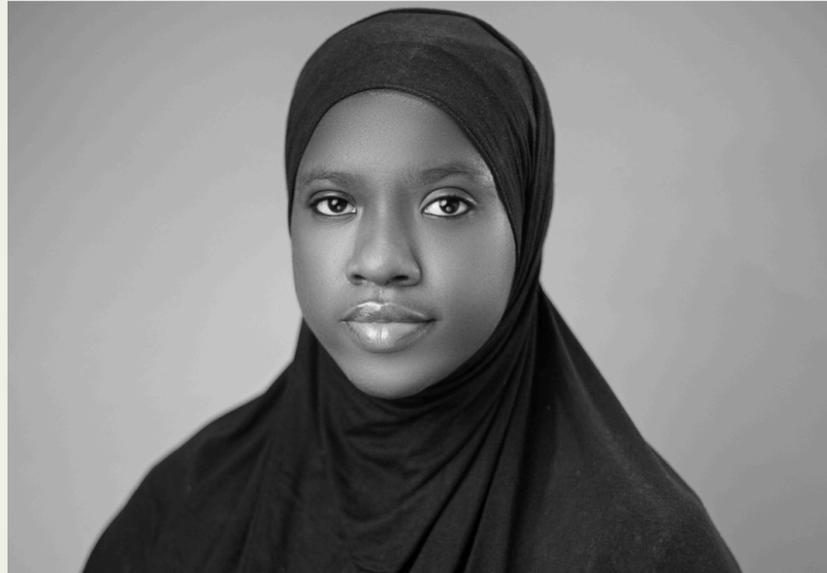
“I really am. I haven’t been the man I promised to be. I haven’t been here... Not really. And I know you’re hurting. I know you’ve been carrying this alone. I just...” He sighed, taking a step forward. “I didn’t know how far we’d drifted until I couldn’t find you.”

His voice was low. Honest.

She stood there for a long moment. Then gave him a small nod. Just once.

And he slowly closed the space between them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MAYMUNATU BUKAR

Maymunatu Bukar is a bilingual writer dedicated to crafting stories that revolve around faith, culture, and love, writing in both Hausa and English with a particular focus on Northern Nigerian narratives. With over seven years of writing experience and more than a million reads on Wattpad, she views storytelling as a vital means of preserving and honoring her culture, especially as someone from a historical town in Northern Nigeria. She is particularly drawn to narratives that highlight women's experiences and delve into themes of identity, faith, and societal expectations. Maimunatu is a creative committed to leaving a lasting legacy through her words, sharing stories that reflect authentic truths and resonate across generations. Over the next three months, she aims to complete her current manuscript and begin polishing a previously completed first draft, focusing on improving structure, pacing, and overall narrative flow.

NORTHERN NARRATIVES INITIATIVE

