

Amina Jeeva

## **Singer of the Majalis**

*Terror, pain, despair and reckless abandon fill every heart as the voice rises and falls, hurtling them in amongst clashing swords at Karbala, where Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, stands firm with his tiny band against an army of thousands. □ Fusing them all into one, the voice has transformed them into Zainab, sister of Hussain, who sees, rising up before her, the apparition of Ali, their father - mutilated and bloody - murdered by those who had turned against him, against the son-in-law of the Prophet as they now turn against, Ali's son, trapped here at Karbala.*

*In that moment, on the tenth day of Muharrum, they look out of Zainab's eyes, and watch helplessly from their tent as their dear brother marches resolutely into battle with seventy-two men to oppose an army of four thousand. They listen as he challenges the enemy to end his life, the life of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.*

*Hope fills their hearts for a moment when they see Hur, Ibn Ziad's army commander, come to beg forgiveness and swear to fight by Hussain's side. But he comes alone.*

*There can be no reprieve.*

*As they will their strength into the hearts and minds of the seventy-two, they feel their men brace themselves into a fearless and resolute force. Pride striving with fear in their breasts, they*

*watch as their warriors win all the single combat fights that traditionally open battles. Then when the legions charge, hope rises again as their men fiercely drive back their opponents. But they are too few; the enemy surges over them like a tidal wave. □ And the voice fills the air with their grief as they witness the slaughter of nephews, brothers and uncles, all of the Prophet's line.*

*After all Hussain's men have been slain, the voice compels them into the midst of enemy soldiers, to watch their grievously wounded brother, standing his ground alone as he is hacked to death. □ After they slash off his head, Ibn Ziad's men tear off the remnants of his clothes and ten horsemen ride over his dismembered limbs, crushing them to a bloody pulp.*

*Then begins a diabolical triumphal march in which Hussain's head and the heads of many others, impaled on spears, are paraded all the way to Kufah. □ Left behind, the women and children sit, silent and empty, in their tents on the battlefield of Karbala.*

□  
*They are not present when their brother's head is flung down at the feet of Governor Ibn Ziad but the relentless voice carries them to the scene and forces them to experience unspeakable desecration as the governor mockingly beats the lips of the rolling head with his stick.*

*Two days later, dishevelled and in rags, the women and children are marched to Kufah and ushered into the presence of Ibn Ziad. As the Governor jeers at their brother Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, the voice bursts from them, giving them Zainab's words with which to confront Ibn Ziad and throw his blasphemies in his face. Infuriated, Ibn Ziad threatens to execute Zainul-Abidin, Hussain's only surviving son but they challenge him to put them both to death and force him to back down.*

*With this strong motif of Zainab's courage and compassion, the voice restored to them the lives that they forfeited as Hussain in the recital of this harrowing tale, and found again in Zainab's love and courage.*

The narrative ended, the room in which the listening women were seated swam back into view. Looking around into one another's drained, exhausted faces, they recognised each other for who they were. Throughout the recital, the singer, calm and controlled, had passed out glasses of water to comfort those in extreme distress. No one had spoken. None could. The only life, they had had, was the life given to them by the voice.

They had not even been aware when their screaming infants and crying babies had been removed from the assembly.

Nothing had been allowed to vitiate the impact of the tale of martyrdom and tragedy.

Even though they heard it every year, in the month of Muharrum, it never failed to lift them out of themselves to experience, as Hussain and then Zainab, the events at Karbala.

And it was Amina Jeeva's voice, dark eyes and expressive features that transported them every year on the anniversary of Ashura to that battlefield to relive the first ten days of Muharrum , 61 AH (680 AD).

Her melodious voice, conveying every nuance of a minor scale, united all the women in the room with the pain and suffering of Zainab and the women at Karbala. The Majalis ceremony, a recital performed by women for women, brought home their vulnerability in the macho world of power politics and warmongering.

Amina Jeeva's dramatic rendering gave the tale such life that even the children, among them Amina's nieces, who came each night mainly for the goodies that were served after the ceremony, involuntarily fell under her spell. Though they may not have understood fully the story told in Urdu, the narration, nevertheless, filled them with awe and reverence.

At the end, they all drank the spicy milk, specially prepared for the occasion, as solemnly as Christians at communion.

The Majalis was a twelve-day ceremony to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussain. With the death of Hussain on the tenth day, the tale reached its climax; the eleventh and twelfth days were for healing. On these days, the sick lay on the floor wrapped in sheets while Amina prayed for them as she rolled them from side to side. Finally on the twelfth day of Muharrum, the day of burial, they ate apples for their healing power and threw the cores on the roof.

Amina Jeeva's mother, a scholarly woman, who lived a quiet, devout life, had initiated the Majalis service in the Asiatic Bazaar to keep alive a tradition with which she had grown up in India. At the ceremony, Amina sang, her mother explained the story with Amina's nieces, Jainab and Shahida, joining her in reading the prayers. For these occasions, Amina put on her long flowing dress, ijar, and a dupatta to cover her shining, black hair. Sitting on the floor, she conducted the service from behind the coffee table decorated like an altar with flowers, incense and holy vessels. As the women, who attended the *Majalis*, fervently believed that the water, in the little bottles they had set on the coffee table, was transformed into an elixir during the recital, they distributed their bottles to the sick and ailing afterwards.

And so the ghosts of Karbala were laid to rest until the following year.

Now Amina Jeeva's powerful voice has also been stilled. She died on 1 April,

2001, the ninth day of the month of Muharrum, before Ashurah, the anniversary of the terrible battle on the tenth. Perhaps she went to join the women of Karbala whose suffering she had brought to life every year without fail for more than three decades. Did her constant evocation of the events leading to the slaughter at Karbala influence her personal destiny? Did she bring the same kind of doom upon herself so that she too would end her days wandering in the wilderness, crying for succour?

People do not remember her like that. They knew her as a strong, independent woman with the ability and will to achieve anything to which she set her mind. Her helplessness at the end was a complete contradiction.

How does one account for Amina, a woman so completely her own person? She lived the life of a woman of the twenty-first century in a time and place dominated by the ethos of the nineteenth century. Born on 9 December 1924, in the Asiatic Bazaar, Amina was the daughter of Mahomed Jeeva, who owned properties on Eleventh Street, which overlooked the Apies River. On the one stand was the large family house of brick while on the stand next to it was the typical location barracks-type arrangement of rooms with kitchens enclosing a yard. Next to this stand, were shops, with Mr Jeeva's barbershop occupying the corner of Grand and Eleventh Streets.

Even though he was a businessman, landlord and traditional healer, it was this barbershop by which the local people characterised him and he was known as Jeeva Barber.

His only son, Omar, managed the barbershop. Amina's brother, a gentle soul, ten years older than his sister, demonstrated none of the assertiveness and authority that characterised Amina.

She was a tomboy, who wore trousers and shirts, rode a bicycle, then a motorcycle, was the first Indian woman in Pretoria to drive a car, a taxi sometimes, and the only one ever to fly a plane.

Her mother and her niece, Jainab, once went with her to Wonderboom Airfield for one of her training flights. As she rose into the air, her mother exclaimed, "Allah, she is flying into the clouds."

She was terrified she would never see her daughter again.

Amina was quite different from other Muslim girls. Instead of learning to cook and clean, she followed her father around his vulcanising business, learning how to change tyres and batteries, fix punctures and diagnose engine problems.

As a result, she developed a keen interest in cars.

It wasn't surprising, therefore, that she became the first Indian woman in the Asiatic Bazaar to drive a car or that she helped out with the taxi business that Omar had established or that she became a driving instructress and taught many women to drive, including her nieces when they were old enough. She even set up her own used car dealership in the

*cul de sac*

at Eleventh Street with cars that she picked up at auctions.

In 1956, her father, knowing how much she loved cars, made her a very special gift of a Chrysler convertible with an alarm system and all the modern conveniences of the time, including a little refrigerator.

Amina was such a good driver that she was once awarded a medal by the Traffic Department.

The people in the location, however, did not concur

Whenever they saw her big blue Chrysler coming, they hastily got out of her way because, more often than not, she took corners on two wheels.

She loved speed and set a family record for the trip from Lourenço Marques (LM, now Maputo) to Pretoria!

It was when her mother fell seriously ill while she was visiting her sister, Rabia, in LM.

On receiving the news, Amina, driving alone along narrow roads, raced back to Pretoria and made it home in the amazing time of four hours.

Her car wasn't used only for business; it provided a good deal of pleasure as well. Amina loved taking her nieces and their friends on outings, sometimes to Weskoppies Hospital to bring little gifts to the mentally challenged patients there or to the Rebecca Street Cemetery to clean graves and put fresh flowers on them. People remember Amina's visits to the cemetery, not out of gratitude, but for her presumption. She was a Muslim woman. How dare she enter a graveyard! But Amina who lived by her own rules, did not trouble herself with conventions of any kind.

She was a girl, following in her father's footsteps, not only in the vulcanising business, but also in the dispensary that he had established on the stand next to their home. Though people called him Jeeva Barber, her father saw himself as a spiritualist and healer and from him, she learned about the treatment of illnesses, herbal cures and the preparation of medicines. Mr Jeeva was especially known for his ability to cure yellow jaundice. He imported ingredients for his remedies from India, boiled them together in the water tank in the yard and sold his medications at two shillings and sixpence a bottle, a very steep price for those days. Indian and African patients from the locations, who came to consult him, sat in the yard on benches placed against the walls of the dispensary.

Mr Jeeva, whose powers as a spiritualist were widely recognised, also read people's horoscopes or made taweez (amulets) to protect them from evil. In 1952, in an article describing how he had exorcised a ghost that had haunted a woman for fifteen years, a news reporter condescendingly described him as "a Pretoria fakir who dabbles in mysticism and who has routed many poltergeists all over the Union";

Though she emulated her father in everything, Amina did not become a spiritualist. She was more interested in business ventures and her father, a highly successful businessman with a variety of enterprises, owned in addition to the garage and barbershop, a double-storey structure on Boom Street with shops downstairs and a hall upstairs for live entertainment, weddings, dances and even film shows. This property, the Nav Jivan, later became known as the Orient . Mr Jeeva's grandchildren firmly believe that he personally mixed and poured the concrete for the foundations of the building. But the Nav Jivan did not stay in his possession long. Mr Jeeva, apparently too trusting, lost the building when he offered it as collateral to help out a friend. So Amina did not have a chance to become involved in developing it. But as Mr Jeeva was a substantial landlord, with additional stands scattered over the location, Amina became his rent collector and collected rents from residents in units and from shopowners. The big enterprise, Kit Kat Cash and Carry, today located on Church Street in central Pretoria, had its beginnings in one of Mr Jeeva's little shops.

Amina was an uncompromising rent collector. She brooked no challenge to her authority and her stern business manner made her seem quite unapproachable. Tenants, who found the rents exorbitant, dreaded her appearance at their door. Others, like Gafoorkala (Gafoor Aunty), a hawker who sold dhunya (bunches of coriander), discovered a kinder, more charitable side to her nature. When Gafoorkala's son abandoned her, Amina provided her with a rent-free room.

She did the same for another woman and her children whom she rescued from a drunken, abusive husband and father.

Because Amina was tough-minded and independent, Mr Jeeva came to rely on her more than on Omar. His quiet, unassuming son, who ran the barbershop for his father, had established a very reliable taxi service but he did not have a passion for business and was not ambitious like his sister. As he loved dancing, he spent much of his spare time at the dance hall of the Nav Jivan, where his participation in competitions earned him many trophies. But Amina, always with her father, learned about business and how to make money.

Unlike fathers who think of their daughters only in terms of their suitability for marriage, Mr Jeeva, recognising his daughter's talents, made opportunities for her to develop them. When he set her up in the shop next to the barbershop, he gave her the opportunity to become an entrepreneur in her own right. To run the business, a clothing and shoe store, Amina had to learn about wholesaling, retailing, how to choose stock and how to market it. She was an astute, innovative woman who learned very quickly and as her business burgeoned, she began to look far afield for suppliers. Soon she was driving to Johannesburg and Durban to purchase stocks.

When she put a record bar in one corner, the shop became a flourishing enterprise. Amina also became the buyer for the boutique that her sister, Rabia, who had married in LM, opened there and she kept her sister's shop well stocked with quality products.

As Mr Jeeva, originally from LM, owned a number of properties there, the family enterprises were on the Pretoria-LM nexus and Amina found herself ferrying the family back and forth for business and pleasure.

Though she had no interest in housekeeping, Amina had strong maternal instincts and that was apparent in the way she related to her nieces. She behaved more as a parent than an aunt.

According to Shahida, "My aunt wasn't married at all.

So we were her children.

We grew up more with her than my father." Amina wanted them to develop into strong, independent women who could fend for themselves.

They were to be doctors or lawyers. As a good education was key to achieving such goals, she made it her business to supervise her nieces' schoolwork and did not tolerate any backsliding or infringement of school rules.

Though they loved her, her nieces were afraid of her.

If they missed a day at school, they knew they would have to pay.

When they saw her coming to look for them, they disappeared behind the kitchen cupboards.

Jainab, the eldest of her nieces, was her personal little housekeeper. "Actually, she used to say I'm like a little wife for her.

'Wifey' she used to call me.

From small, I never knew what's playing in the street.

I was only with her, you know, doing her work.&quot;

[\[1\]](#)

Jainab cleaned Amina's room, washed her clothes and polished her shoes. Amina, who prepared her for her tests at school, was very proud of her achievements and showed her excellent school reports to all and sundry. Though Amina had not chosen a career for Jainab, she knew she wanted Shahida to study law. Shahida believed that Amina, who could hold her own with the attorneys she encountered, would have made an excellent lawyer herself.

In Shereen, Amina saw a reflection of herself, a little tomboy in pants and shirts, playing cricket, kennetjie and other games with the boys in the street. When Shereen was sixteen, Amina taught her to drive, to diagnose car problems and to change tyres and batteries. When Shereen got her licence, she became Amina's driver taking her on all her business trips.

Twice a week, she drove her to auctions in Pretoria where she watched in awe as her aunt bid for and obtained all kinds of bargains.

Though Amina bought a variety of goods - cameras, kitchen units, beds - anything that people asked her to pick up, her personal interest was in the cars that she purchased for her little lot on Eleventh Street.

Amina was a surrogate parent to her nieces but she longed to have a child of her own. In 1950, when her sister-in-law, Mariam, gave birth to her fourth daughter, Amina decided to adopt the child and raise her as her own.

She would not be depriving Mariam of her child altogether because they were an extended family living in the same house; Omar, Mariam and their children in one wing with Amina and her parents in another.

Sadly, however, little Hanifah died of meningitis when she was just a toddler and Amina having lost her child, felt she had lost her chance at motherhood and was distraught.

Fortunately, she was not allowed to dwell on her grief. She was called upon, just about then, to take a young relative under her wing - Koolsoom Hassim, an attractive eighteen-year old orphan, who had recently lost her father; her mother had died some years before.

Koolsoom and her five siblings lived in Jerusalem Street with grandparents who couldn't control them and thought they were running wild.

Koolsoom's grandmother begged Amina, her first cousin, to take charge of the girl.

Amina immediately decided that Koolsoom should come to live with her.

As her mother did not agree, Amina put Koolsoom to work in her shop instead.

Having inducted her in all aspects of the business, Amina also taught her to drive.

Koolsoom, a very capable young woman and a quick study, was soon running the shop, leaving Amina free to go on business trips

At first Amina was just an aunt looking out for yet another niece but Amina and Koolsoom became more than just relatives or employer and employee. Their relationship grew into an intimate partnership that lasted until Amina's death. But no one speaks of it. Everyone relegates

it to the back of consciousness even though it flickers from behind blank eyes, squeaks between flat tones and hides in nonchalant gestures. No one acknowledges the relationship. It can only be inferred from acrimonious references or homophobic gibes. Amina had long been the object of gossip; there had been whispers of a 'scandalous' liaison with Frances, a white woman in Pretoria town. Amina had had the habit of bringing her home for a meal, then spending hours afterwards chatting with her. For a long time after Frances stopped coming to the house, she remained in touch with Amina.

When Koolsoom came into her life, Amina was happy. "Amina was ten years older than Koolsoom. She eventually did bring Koolsoom into our family and she used to spend most of her time with her." Their involvement led to close ties between the Hassims and Jeevas. As Amina had several nieces and Koolsoom several brothers, marriages between the cousins merged them into one big extended family. According to Shahida, "They (the Hassims) were in Jerusalem Street and when my eldest sister (Janey) got married in the family that house was like our house. We were in and out of the two houses."

But the circumstances of her marriage embittered Janey. "They (Amina and Koolsoom) were so close. She wanted all the girls to get married to her brothers."

Janey, an exceptional student, was looking forward to finishing school so she could take up a career.

However, when Amina discovered that Jainab had a boyfriend at school, she was outraged and took drastic measures.

The aunt who had always insisted that education came first, arranged a marriage and Jainab, who had been Amina's 'little wife' was married off to Koolsoom's brother, Dawood, when she was only fifteen. This excessive punishment for her little transgression devastated her but intimidated by feelings of guilt and shame, she said nothing.

Her grandparents, Mr and Mrs Jeeva, also aghast, did not intervene; they just watched while Amina, riding roughshod over all their feelings, organised an elaborate wedding.

In 1960, Jainab left the house to live with the Hassims in Jerusalem Street.

Unlike her aunt who had had complete freedom to determine her own destiny, Jainab found herself relegated to anonymity as a conventional housewife.

Unlike poor Jainab, however, her tomboy sister, Shereen, who fell in love with Koolsoom's eldest brother, Osman, married to live happily ever after.

For Amina, it was a time of contentment. Two years before, in 1958, when her sister-in-law, Mariam, had given birth to yet another girl, her seventh daughter, Rehana, Amina, still hankering after a child of her own, had adopted the baby. Her nieces, the baby's sisters, with their friends helped Amina take care of Rehana. Amina, who doted on the child, bought her the best of everything.

When Rehana won a baby competition at the Pretoria Primary School, Amina's heart overflowed with maternal pride. She was a mother again; she had Rehana.

In 1965, after Amina's mother died, Amina brought Koolsoom to live with her and became the head of a happy little family of her own.

In the very next year, however, Rehana died of chicken pox. This unexpected blow shattered Amina. She fell into a deep decline, lost all touch with reality and spent hours at the Rebecca Street cemetery everyday reading prayers and grieving. On Sundays, she took loads of flowers to make a floral blanket to cover Rehana's grave. It was difficult to get her away from there. On many occasions her nieces, Shereen and Shahida, had to bring Masi, an elderly neighbour, to the cemetery to persuade her to come home. She was inconsolable. Her father, having watched her agony for several months and realising that it would not abate, decided to send her and Koolsoom on hajj.

In 1966, Amina and Koolsoom travelling to Arabia, to Mecca and Medina, eventually arrived at Karbala, where the martyr Hussain had died. At Karbala, they attended the *Majalis* service with which they were so familiar. But Koolsoom was shocked at the literal enactment at the end. On Ashura, the tenth of Muharrum, in remembrance of Hussain's decapitation, the freshly severed head of a handsome young boy was displayed to the gathering. Apparently, young men willingly sacrificed themselves in that way as they believed it was an act for which they would be rewarded in the hereafter. Though Koolsoom was distressed, Amina accepted it all; the death of a strange boy, willing to embrace eternity, was meaningless compared to the loss of a little daughter who was just beginning life. After Arabia, they left for Pakistan, the final leg of their journey, where Amina, finding a little girl who resembled Rehana, clung to her as if she were her

own. It was clear to Koolsoom that the visit to Mecca and Karbala had not assuaged Amina's grief.

On her return to Pretoria, Amina went back to haunting Rehana's grave. She continued to mourn for three long years. Then suddenly, inexplicably, she returned to a semblance of normality which she retained even after her father's death shortly afterwards. Within six years, Amina had lost three of the people who had been closest to her.

Mr Jeeva was buried next to Rehana in one of the plots that Amina had bought for herself and her father.

After her father's death, things began to change in the household at Eleventh Street. Mr Jeeva, who had bequeathed all his worldly goods to Amina with nothing for his son, had left Omar's family feeling cheated and unhappy. Although he had always played second fiddle to Amina, Omar was, nevertheless, the son and ten years older than his sister; he had not expected his father to flout tradition so totally as to deny him any share of the inheritance.

He had counted on something.

The inequitable settlement led to festering resentment and anger that transformed the Jeeva home into enemy camps. Amina's lifestyle, tacitly accepted before, suddenly offered the pretext for war. As Amina, the beloved aunt, was beyond reach, Koolsoom became the scapegoat, began to be seen as an ambitious, conniving woman intent on robbing the legal heirs of their birthright. The relationship between cousins that had seemed strong and abiding, crumbled under the onslaught of acrimony and suspicion. The desire to gain control over the Jeeva estate pitched Amina in the middle of a tug-o-war between Hassims and Jeevas

And the war makes it difficult to trace the rest of Amina's life. There is no clear voice to tell the story, which dissipates into a maze of accusation and counteraccusation. Sifting through resentments and antagonisms, the Amina who rode the wall of death, who flew her plane into the clouds, who took corners on two wheels, who sang the *Majalis*, disappears, leaving in her place a derelict of her former self. There is no way to know exactly what caused her drastic

deterioration or how to reconcile the different versions of her story. Since the details of the end of her life are recounted as indictments of one side or the other, they are less about Amina and more about the people who were closest to her. What really happened to Amina is reflected in a shattered mirror.

The pictures that can be pieced together, therefore, may have no resemblance to any kind of truth.

Here follow two possible scenarios.

In the first, after Mr Jeeva's death, Amina's nieces, who watched Koolsoom assume more and more control over their aunt and her possessions, began to perceive the Hassims as predators. They owned property and businesses, had received their inheritance from their own parents years before, and were independently wealthy. They had no moral right, therefore, to the Jeeva legacy. Mr Jeeva's will had denied his son, Omar, his inheritance and Omar's daughters expected the Hassims to make honourable reparation as the Jeevas were the rightful heirs.

Amina, caught between the factions - she loved Koolsoom and she loved her nieces - was having difficulty negotiating the strong currents pulling her from one side to the other. So she went about business as usual trying to ignore the strife around her. She continued to conduct the

*Majali*

s service with her nieces, Jainab and Shahida reciting the prayers, and their mother, Mariam, preparing the special milk with Koolsoom. Though the service was meant to heal the sick and suffering, it was conducted without reference to the cancer that was eating away at the family.

The skirmishes continued until the Group Areas Act put the finishing touch to a household that had been emotionally and psychologically divided for many years. In 1976, when they quit the Asiatic Bazaar to take up residence in Laudium, Amina and Omar went their separate ways. They bought properties in Himalaya Street not far from each other in terms of distance but very far in terms of trust. In Laudium, Amina began construction of a house for herself and Koolsoom. After she had designed a double-storey structure, she went about looking for

materials, bought a door here, a window there until, piece-by-piece, she had put a home together. Amina and Koolsoom ran the businesses that she had inherited in the Asiatic Bazaar but the barbershop remained under Omar's management, an unsatisfactory arrangement, as underlying resentment made co-operation difficult and little problems led to perceptions of malicious intent. When Omar was ill or his car out of order, his family believed that Amina would not help him because Koolsoom objected.

Nevertheless, Amina remained on good terms with her nieces who visited her often with trays of home-cooked meals. Amina, who had never learned to cook, loved her sister-in-law Mariam's cooking.

After some time, the hostilities between the Jeevas and Hassims abated. They declared a truce. They were, after all, connected by two marriages. Besides, living in separate households had taken the strain off their relationship. But when another of the Jeeva girls became involved with one of Koolsoom's brothers, Koolsoom was blamed for having instigated the affair. This became the pretext to resume hostilities against her and Amina's nieces armed themselves with new accusations, suspicions and recriminations.

When Amina and Koolsoom were going through a bad patch, Koolsoom, who had left Amina and gone to stay with her sister, was suspected of an affair with a married man and was blamed for Amina's state of severe depression.

Koolsoom returned after about a year. Her cousins believed that she went back only after Amina had promised to sign everything over to her. Once she was back, she ruled the roost. She stopped the *Majalis* service, took in one of her brothers who was in some kind of trouble with nowhere to go and converted the prayer room, where the *Majalis* had been held, into a barbershop for him. Amina became the victim of abuse; her car was sold and she was locked up in the house. As she was not allowed to have visitors, she was sent upstairs when the Hassims were entertaining friends.

It was obvious that she was being neglected as she often telephoned her nieces and sister, begging them to bring food

They would rush over, meet Amina who was waiting behind the security gate at the front door, hand over the food and watch her wolf it down. She gave them the impression that she had to eat it all up right there at the gate before anyone returned. Amina, who had always been fastidious about her appearance, looked haggard and unkempt. Apparently, all her teeth had been extracted because of the gold fillings that were of great value. In this account, Amina was

kept drugged and docile.

Koolsoom, who managed all her properties and businesses, kept the telephone locked.

Then she attempted to have Amina committed to Weskoppies Hospital. Sometime before she died, Amina managed somehow to get in touch with her sister, Rabia, who was now living in Laudium.

When she begged her to rescue her from her prison, Rabia went with the police to fetch her. Amina had asked Rabia to meet her at the garage.

Despite her weakened condition, she had somehow managed to remove the heavy bars that held the door down and escaped with her sister.

Five weeks later, she died.

Rabia, unable to obtain Amina's personal documents from Koolsoom, could not fulfil Amina's wish to be buried in the plot next to Rehana and her father at the Rebecca Street cemetery. Amina was buried in the Laudium cemetery.

Koolsoom made no enquiries after Amina nor did she attend the funeral. After Amina's death, Koolsoom, who had acquired her entire estate, continues to run the businesses that were established in the Asiatic Bazaar. She is described as a woman who is making lots of money only to lose it all just as swiftly. An inveterate gambler, she is dissipating all her inherited wealth in the casinos in the area.

But the memories can be put together to form a different picture.

In the second scenario, Koolsoom had the care of a woman, suffering from some form of dementia, who required constant attention. As Amina was always in a state of anxiety, she ground her teeth so fiercely that they had to be extracted to prevent damage to herself. For her own safety, she had to be locked in when Koolsoom went to work or she would wander off alone and when they searched for her, would find her on the streets far from home. Koolsoom, who had to keep all the businesses running and look after Amina, couldn't manage alone so members of her family came to stay with her to help her out.

Before her illness, Amina had made a huge investment in jewellery. This was their security if things did not work out for them under the new government in South Africa. The jewellery, worth a fortune, would sustain them in a new life elsewhere. When the jewellery mysteriously disappeared, Amina, greatly agitated by the loss, was constantly trying to find out who had taken it. Though Koolsoom had her suspicions, she kept them to herself.

Without her jewellery, Amina, who no longer had a buffer against an uncertain future, became extremely insecure, quite irrational and easy to manipulate. One day, in a delusional state, she was taken away while Koolsoom was at work. Koolsoom never saw her again. She died in her sister Rabia's house. Because of their inimical relationship, Koolsoom did not make contact with Amina's family nor did she attend the funeral. She misses her partner very much and remembers sadly the quiet evenings that she, Amina and her brother spent together watching television . Koolsoom's brother died a few months after Amina and Koolsoom now lives alone in the big double-storey house.

The singer of the *Majalis* is no more, and like the martyr she sang of, spent her last days in a war. Though she was not physically hacked to pieces like Hussain, her life at the end held little coherence. It is better to remember Amina as she was in the Asiatic Bazaar - a remarkable woman exploring all aspects of her potential, not allowing herself to be confined by limiting social customs or cross-eyed visions of life's grand offerings.

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[1] Interview: Jainab Dawood, 2002