

“ROMANCE”

FOR LESSON

*Listening as
a Creative Act***NARRATOR** Su'ad Abdul Khabeer

ABDUL KHABEER [laughter] When I was in college, I liked this one guy. It was funny, this guy. He was Syrian American, I think, from the Midwest. And it was funny because he was like a year below me in school, and he liked me, but I didn't realize it. And I was like, why is he always pestering me, you know, so, but also 'cause he was short and so — at least shorter than me. And so I was kind of like, I don't know what's going on here. Like, what is happening? [laughter] And it's funny. It wasn't until our, like, relationship was over, I realized we actually had a relationship.

RUN TIME **4:08**

Because, like, we would hang out — well, actually, it's like — there's two parts to that. So, we would, like, hang out. We would go to — we study together, like, libraries, this kind of thing, eat, you know, eat food or whatever. And then at a certain point, I realized that he liked me, then I was, like, oh, and he wasn't bad-looking. I mean, he was short, but he wasn't bad-looking. So, I was like — I mean he was hella white but, you know, whatever. [laughter] I was like, whatever. I was like, oh, okay, whatever. So, we actually had a conversation. I remember once we were sitting, like, outside at school, and he was like, “If we had kids, they would be black.” I was like, “Yeah, they'd totally be black.” Because he was really into hip-hop, too, and I'm so black, so it was like — you know like, and not like color-wise but, you know, like, it's, like, whatever, so whatever.

But it was funny. So that summer, he writes me some letter and some like, you know, whatever. 'Cause basically, he went home to his parents I guess, and I think he was, like, broaching the idea, and they were like, oh, hell to the no, right, and so he just was kind of ... So, he kind of, like, broke it off with me like over a letter or something like that. It was funny, too. [laughter] Whatever.

ALI Did the letter — I mean did it touch on the —

ABDUL KHABEER Yeah.

ALI — the parental thing?

ABDUL KHABEER Yeah, it kind of did.

ALI Really?

ABDUL KHABEER Yeah. It wasn't like explicit for when I remember, but it did, kind of, say like, "You know, this probably is not gonna work out 'cause —" You know, that kind of thing. It probably would — probably email I guess at that time, this kind of thing because of that, yeah, definitely, I'm sure. No, 'cause I knew, like, this is what was going on. And so, it's funny to me because I think he is married now — I haven't seen him in a really long time — to a Syrian. And I think all of the — So like, I — it's funny because — because of the way that I was raised pro-Black but pro-Muslim, so I saw other Muslims as all potential, like, objects of affection and marriage.

There was this guy Muhammad who's Palestinian that I had a crush on once when I was younger. Like, I crush on everybody, so it wasn't, like, whatever. It was that kind of thing. But, like, I think he — not actually, Muhammad, I think, may — actually may have not married a Palestinian. He might have married like a South Asian woman in the — like in the future, you know, like, today. I'm not really sure. But this other guy, I had a crush on who was a Kashmiri when I was, like, in college or, like, out of college or something like that. He married a Kashmiri, you know?

And it's funny, I had this relationship with this guy, like my — my first probably, like, real relationship when I was like 24 or five — 26. I have to think what year is

that. Twenty-six, 24, 20 – 25, 26, something like that. And he was Puerto Rican from Queens. And I was, like, oh, this is why they wanna stick with their own people. And I was like that because it was really comfortable 'cause it was like we knew and understood –

ALI Oh, you felt that with him?

ABDUL KHABEER Yes.

ALI Okay. Okay.

ABDUL KHABEER Yeah, with the Puerto Rican. So I was like – you know, he's from New York, you know what I mean? And I had just – came back from Panama for, like, my second time to spending the summer there. I had spent – you know? So, it was like – there this was, like, cultural, like, just all these cultural connections. And I was, like, oh, that's what that's about. [laughter] I remember being like, oh, I get it now. And not that you have to do that, but I was like, now I see why they do that kind of thing.

Now, I don't think that's why they're doing it. I think they're doing it because their parents are like, "You can't do whatever." But I – but I could feel why that would make sense to somebody, right? 'Cause it felt really comfortable or whatever, that kind of thing, but yeah. So, he was funny and that didn't last. Allah protected me, too. But he was cute. [laughter] But, you know, I really was protected [laughter] from that as well. But – but yeah. But I think – so it was like – you know, so in terms of like romance, like, I was always unrequited for, like, a really long time or whatever that kind of thing. But I was doing what I was doing.

BIO Su’ad Abdul Khabeer was born in 1978 and raised in Crown Heights and Flatbush. She earned her Bachelor of Science in foreign service from Georgetown University; her diploma in Arabic and Islamic studies from Abu Nour University in Damascus, Syria; and her Doctor of Philosophy in cultural anthropology from Princeton University. She examined the relationship between race and popular culture in her book *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (2016) and ongoing performances of *Sampled: Beats of Muslim Life*. She joined the faculty at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 2011 as a professor of American culture and Arab and Muslim American studies.

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