

Room for *the whole you*.

Nine short stories. The people are fictional; the moments may feel familiar.

zaha.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Life rarely moves in a straight line.

Each story begins with a worry you may know, and shows what happens when a therapist and a spiritual advisor work from one plan.

Characters and settings are fictional and do not depict actual clients or Zaha providers. These stories are not testimonials or promises of treatment outcomes.

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01

An hour that was hers

ZAINAB



Zainab has been up since five with three children. When the house is finally quiet, she sits by the window and cannot think what she would do with an hour.



Her sister is chopping herbs in the kitchen when Zainab says it: she is tired in a way sleep does not fix. Her sister puts the knife down and listens.



Her therapist asks when she last had an hour that was hers. Zainab laughs, then stops. They write one into her plan: Saturday mornings, while her husband has the children.



Her advisor sees her alone for a session, and asks what she needs. Afterwards Zainab prays slowly, with nobody waiting for her to finish.



On Saturday she walks the garden path with her friend. The children are at home with their father, and no one calls. The hour is hers.

02

At the same table

ZAHRA AND AMIN



Zahra and Amin eat at the same table most nights. Their daughter, Inaya, draws between them, and neither of them has said a full sentence to the other all week.



Her friend asks over tea whether she has told Amin how she feels. Zahra says it is easier to tell everyone else first.



With their therapist, Zahra says out loud what she has been holding. The plan they leave with is small: ten minutes at the table, no phones.



The imam suggests the hour after dinner be spent on the floor with Inaya, with no phones and no talk of the week. She shows them the drawing she has been working on.



On Friday Amin washes the greens while Zahra sets the table and Inaya folds the napkins. Nobody says anything clever. The table feels different.

03

The room outside the room

KHALID



Khalid has been outside the prayer room for ten minutes, unsure whether his wudu counted. His friend Sami sits down on the floor beside him and does not ask why.



He tells his therapist it is the same doubt every time, and it always wants one more check. She shows him that the checking is what feeds it. They put one thing on his plan: wash once, and walk on.



In a session of just the two of them, an older imam tells him what the religion asks. Wash once, and it counts. A doubt that comes after does not undo it. Khalid asks him to say it again.



On Friday evening, Khalid and Sami wait out a dryer at the laundromat, laughing at nothing. The doubt still visits now and then. He lets it, and goes on with his evening.

04

More than the result

KARIM



Karim’s results letter has sat unopened on the step beside him since morning. Inside is a number his whole family has been waiting on.



At the kitchen table his father asks how he is, not what he got. Karim has rehearsed for the second question, and has no answer for the first.



His therapist asks what the number would mean. Karim says it would decide whether he was worth what his parents gave up. She asks him to say that again, slowly.



On the masjid steps, the imam talks with him alone, in a session just for the two of them. He asks Karim what he is good at when nobody is marking him. Karim takes a long time to answer.



A week on, Karim sits in the long grass, turning a seed over in his fingers. The letter is open beside him, and he is in no hurry to read it again.

05

Room to breathe

DALIA



Dalia has not taken a day off since spring. Over coffee her friend asks how she is, and Dalia answers with her whole schedule.



Her therapist asks her to describe a day with no schedule in it. Dalia cannot. They start small and put one empty afternoon in her plan.



Later, a woman from her masjid talks with her alone. She says Dalia has been working as if rest needed someone's permission. Dalia laughs, and takes a breath that goes all the way down.

06

After the plans changed

AMAL



Amal has taken down the plans she made for the next five years. Over tea, her aunt listens to all of it and does not try to fix any of it.



Her therapist asks what she is still afraid of. Amal says that she wasted the years. They begin with the mornings, and put one small thing in her plan: a walk before work.



After the dawn prayer, an older woman from the masjid sits down beside her. She tells Amal about the year her own plans came apart, and what she built after. She does not promise Amal the same.



Months later, Amal walks the cliff path with her friend, the wind pulling her scarf out behind her. She has no five-year plan yet. This morning she does not need one.

07

The ride back

RIZAL



Rizal’s toast went cold an hour ago. It is the third morning he has not gone in to work, and he cannot say why.



His friend Hadi turns up without warning and takes him down to the water. Hadi does not ask for reasons, and Rizal ends up saying more than he planned to.



Rizal tells his therapist what he told Hadi, and a little more. They put one thing on his plan, small enough for a bad day: ten minutes outside, at any hour.



The imam asks him for just one prayer a day, whichever is easiest. That evening Rizal prays it slowly on the rug in his room.



Two weeks later, Hadi arrives with a second bike. They ride the long way back along the water, and Rizal is the one setting the pace.

08

Before the next deadline

DINA



Dina has a thesis chapter due on Friday and has not gone in. She sits on the steps outside with her bag, telling herself she will start in a minute.



Her aunt puts a bowl of soup in front of her and asks nothing. Halfway through it, Dina says the whole thing out loud: she is afraid she is not good enough.



Her therapist helps her cut Friday into small pieces, and they write the first one into her plan: one page before lunch.



An elder from the masjid, who has watched many students come and go, tells Dina about her own worst exam week, and how she got through it a page at a time.



On Friday the same steps are in sun. The chapter is handed in. She is already nervous about the next one, and goes to lunch anyway.

09

A small patch of ground

SAMIRA



Since her mother died, Samira buys oranges for no one. The stall at closing time is the only place anyone still says her name.



A neighbour from the next street stops to talk and does not hurry. Samira says more in five minutes than she has in a month.



Her therapist asks what the evenings are like. Samira says quiet, and then, for the first time since the funeral, she says more. Together they put one small thing in her plan: a visit each week.



On Thursday the women from the masjid come with tea, as they would for family. An elder tells Samira how long her own grief took, and nobody asks her to hurry.



A few months on, she takes the neighbour’s offer of a small patch of ground. Her hands are in the soil, and she is laughing at how bad she is at it.

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