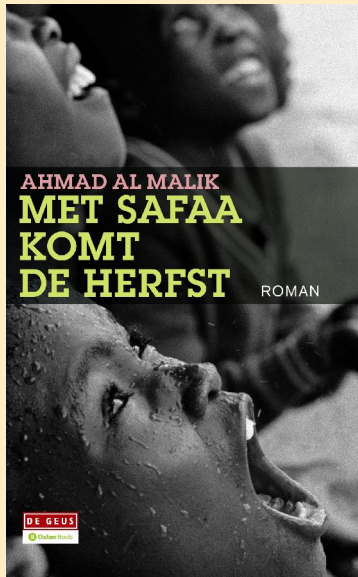




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Ahmed Al Malik

With Safaa Comes the Rain

Original title: *Met Safaa komt de regen*

NOVEL

Incisive story, that paints a critical picture of the problems of life in Sudan

‘Al Malik is without doubt one of the most promising writers of his generation.’ – *Fnac*

World Rights
Publishing House De Geus
Contact: Sander van Vlerken
P.O. Box 1878
4801 BW Breda
The Netherlands
Phone: (31) 76 522 8151
Fax: (31) 76 522 2599
Email: rights@degeus.nl

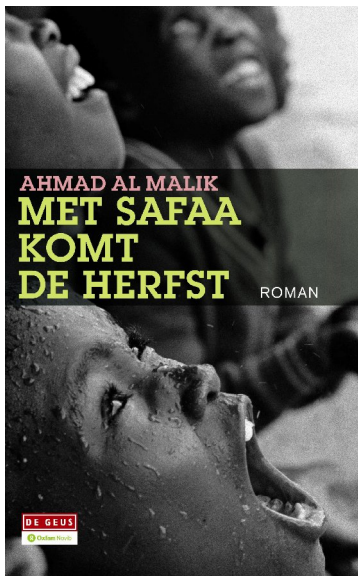
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About the author

Ahmad Al Malik (Sudan, 1967) studied in Khartoum, where he published articles and short stories in various newspapers. After graduating he worked as a teacher in his hometown in northern Sudan. Following the 1989 coup it became increasingly difficult for a critical writer to carry on working freely – Al Malik's first novella was confiscated because of its critical attitude towards the regime. He fled to the Netherlands at the end of the 1990s.

Al Malik's novels have been published in Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and France. He lives in Amsterdam.

Al Malik has written a critical observation of the civil war that has dominated modern Sudanese history. In lucid, poetic language he lovingly and humorously describes the rise and fall of a dictator, his country and his subjects.



About the book

An old man turns up in a small village in northern Sudan. He is a former dictator, who once ruled this country for a number of decades. With the help of an old map, he searches for the house where he grew up. Unfortunately, it has been lost to the advancing desert. Trapped in the twists and turns of his mind and on the verge of amnesia, he wanders around, dejected and lonely, looking for traces of things he has long forgotten.

He remembers the events that made him powerful. Along the way, he made many enemies. Finally Safaa, a young diplomat, seemed to be the only person he could trust. He appointed her Minister of Social Affairs and several times asked her to marry him. But then Safaa disappeared without a trace.

Sudanese poet and novelist Afif Ismail compares WITH SAFAA COMES THE RAIN to THE PRESIDENT by Miguel Ángel Asturias and THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH by Gabriel García

Márquez. Xavier Luffin, associate professor at the Department of Arabic at the Free University of Brussels, compares Al Malik to Moses Isegawa. Jan Jaap de Ruiter, member of the Department of Language and Cultural Studies at the University of Tilburg, recommends this novel as ‘an accurate psychological portrait of a ruler’.

Ahmed Al Malik, *Met Safaa komt de regen*

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Excerpt

Al-Hajja Fatima Bitt Hajj al-Zein was jolted awake by the frightful yell of Suleiman Hajj Ali the Lame. For a moment she thought he was calling the faithful to dawn prayer. But no, there was already far too much grey morning light filtering through the room for that. His voice rang out again, cutting through the cacophony of bird song. ‘The Marshal is here!’ she heard him yelling in alarm. ‘Villagers, the Marshal is here!’

The details of a dream she’d had a while before immediately came flooding back to her. She was with a group of villagers, kneeling in thankful prayer to Allah, because the dusty bed of the Argo was once again full of water, after years of drought. ‘May Allah reward the Marshal,’ she said, as she removed her white *crêpe tob*.

Al-Hajja Fatima cursed Satan, who was tempting her to go back to sleep, threw off her blanket and got up. She walked through to the biggest room of the house, where her three grandchildren were still fast asleep, and started to operate the hand pump. With each rasping movement, its leather gasket gave a sharp squeak; the water gushed out to the rhythm of her wrist. She poured the warm water into the bowl she used for ritual washing, sat down on her prayer rug and cleansed herself. She then set the water carefully aside and finally started to pray.

After prayer, she was about to put a kettle full of water on the fire to make tea when she suddenly remembered she was out of sugar - no sugar had been given in exchange for food vouchers for quite some time and she didn’t have enough money to buy sugar at full price in the market. She walked out into the courtyard - how stiff her joints felt today – and opened the clay pot that held her supply of dates for Ramadan. She took out a couple, placed them in an aluminium dish, and covered the pot with a stone, so that the dogs couldn’t get at its contents. She then walked slowly back inside, brewed the tea and woke her grandchildren, who had been orphans since their father had gone away more than ten years previously, dressed in his military uniform, and had never been seen again. A couple of days after he left, she had heard his name on the radio: he was one of a group of officers who had been executed after being found guilty of an attempted coup against the military regime.

Al-Hajja Fatima couldn't bring herself to shed a single tear for the fate of her only son. She turned off the radio for the last time, and never touched it again, even when the spiders covered it with their webs. For the first time in years, she went out in search of the little property her late husband had owned and realised that his asceticism during life had been born of necessity, because in fact he owned almost nothing, apart from a few palm trees beside the banks of the Argo, and they were almost certain to be blown away by the first gust of wind of the season, just like his couple of hectares of arid land, bequeathed to some dozen heirs, some of whom were already dead.

Al-Hajja Fatima again heard Suleiman the Lame yelling: 'Villagers, the Marshal is here!' Driven by curiosity, she opened her door a little to peep out into the empty street. Suddenly, she saw the great man emerging from the sesbania at the side of the road, only he wasn't walking, his enormous body was rolling down as if he was being pushed by somebody. A glimpse of his face was enough to tell Al-Hajja Fatima that he was suffering from the disease of loneliness. It was hard to believe that a man who looked like that had enjoyed so much power. She didn't realise that in fact he was yet another victim of his own illusions: the creature she was watching tumble down this deserted street had picked up more dust than glory during his more than four decades in power. She didn't realise that the trail this man left behind, like that of a dweller of the now-vanished desert, was nothing more than the remnants of the drought of the infamous days when he had ruled the country, a time transformed by his media into a flourishing period, with impressive results that had helped the country to shake off its state of mendicancy and derailment and usher in a period of self-sufficiency and even export its harvests to neighbouring countries. It was also a period in which order had reigned, thanks to a security force that had spread through the country like a cancer. Reports from the force had poured in daily: 'Mr President, we've been monitoring the demonstrations. We've taken the dead – seventy-nine in total – to the morgue and the wounded to the emergency rooms of various hospitals. We've arrested ten clandestine leaders responsible for the unrest, and also thirty officers who were planning to exploit the situation to stage a coup they intended to call the "Fourth of August Revolution". They chose the fourth of August because it was the only day in the whole year that did not yet bear the name of a revolution. We have cleaned up the city centre, where antisocial scum had torn your statue from its pedestal and rolled it in the mud. And we have also removed the piles of broken windscreen and shop-window glass that were strewn all over Republic Street.'