

"THE CROWS PLUCKED YOUR SINEWS"

by

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Playscript Tour 2016

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PROLOGUE REAL TIME

SCENE: A YOUNG SOMALI WOMAN OF 27 OUTSIDE THE BACK OF EAST LONDON MASJID IN LONDON. SHE IS WEARING A BLACK ABAYA AND WHITE HIJAB.

A BUSKER PLAYS

FROM INSIDE WE CAN HEAR THE CONGREGATION RECITE THE OPENING OF THE JANNAZAH PRAYER FOR THE DEAD.

VOICE: *Allah Akbar
Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem
Al hamdu lillaahi rabbil 'alameen
Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem Maaliki yaumid Deen
Iyyaaka na'abudu wa iyyaaka nasta'een
Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem
Siraatal ladheena an 'amta' alaihim
Ghairil maghduubi' alaihim waladaaleen
Aameen*

WE SEE HER REACT TO PEOPLE PASSING BY. SOMETIMES SHE RETURNS THEIR STARE. SHE PUTS SOME CHANGE IN THE BUSKER'S HAT.

SUUBAN [to audience]: Suuban. I never liked my name growing up. No one could say it right, Soobahan, Soben, but that was before I knew what it meant. Now I love it.

I wonder what people see in their mind's eye when they look at me? Am I in black and white? Or colour?

[She reaches under the garment and we see a flash of jeans. Her hand emerges with a pack of cigarettes and a box of matches. As she puts the cigarette to her lips she mutters]

SUUBAN

Bismillah - *Bismillah*...? [shakes head and puts cigarette back in the pack].

Do they see me as placid and accepting, an exotic waiting to be freed perhaps? And then re-imprisoned in my liberator's fantasy of what lies beneath? Or invisible? A shadow? Or an infection - the carrier of a constantly-multiplying jihadi-virus?

I used to try and guess what was behind each and every sideways look and stare. But not today. Manta, today, I bury my grandmother, my ayeeyo. In there they are saying the jannazah prayer for the dead. Somalis have come from far and wide, from everywhere...because we are everywhere - like the genie you released from the bottle - or jinn as we call them. As my father used to say in his darkest moments, after watching the news of random Somali disgracing themselves - 'Sheytaanka addum ka, lagu sii daayey' - 'the Satan has been set free onto the earth'.

When I first read Surah al-Jinn at mosque lessons after school, it popped into my head that we Somalis, scattered across the planet, are not humans at all, we are really jinn - existing in this world but in another dimension,

mostly invisible to mankind, exiled by Allah to the furthest flung places; perched on mountains, in treetops, crossing deserts, frozen wastes and the oceans - those jinn who wander ceaselessly, at magical speeds and without rest. It made perfect sense to me...still does.

'There are some amongst us righteous and some of us are otherwise. We are divided into different ways'.

Alhamdulillah, Alhamdulillah, the wandering Somali-jinn from Switzerland, from Canada, from Norway, flying across the waters, have reached here today with their prayer beads and humility, to offer their du'a to speed my grandmother to the garden of paradise. [pause - drag of cigarette].

Later some will come back to our house in Woolwich, to talk about her. To turn her into a legend. And then they will be gone.

But none of them really knew her, even her own daughter, my mother, who brought her to live with us in Woolwich for her final days. I knew her best, only I entered her universe, only to me did she reveal her memories. She passed onto me, only me, the stories of her mother - my great grandmother. A woman darwiish fighter in Somalia one hundred years ago.

[Pause] Now those memories rest in me. It is a burden to be

honest. What am I to do with this? I can't forget it. Yes, I am at peace with myself, but I am at war with this world of ours. For the first time in my life, I don't feel lost. I feel like a proper nomad [giggles] - mantaa I am ready to start a journey. But what path to take? What direction? What destination to point my camel towards?

It all started back in 2011, when I began to see my ayeeyo for the first time.

ACT 1 SCENE 1 WOOLWICH, SOUTH LONDON COUNCIL HOUSE,

2 MAY 2011

I used to ignore her - my ayeeyo - grandmother - I couldn't deal with her weirdness, her dementia, I would pretend she wasn't here, living with us, living out her time in the boxroom at the top of the stairs. I would ignore her calls for help "Suuban, macaan, callay inta, hadda, hadda, habibti!" Then one day my father cornered me while I was brushing my teeth and gave me the hardest talk I ever had. He knew he was dying, but we didn't. The cancer took him quick, quick.

[We hear the invocation on hearing of a death: '*Inna lillahi was inna ilaihi rajioon'*].

SUUBAN: I know now that he was trying to sort out what he could. 'Suuban, daughter, - you want to be someone, to do something. Then start with her - all the duas, the prayers are with her. They are with her'. From that day I took over

from him, looking after her. I work like a militant so I could have her blessings, and his. In the morning, I go to her room and empty out the jar of spit. The medicine makes her hawk, and she used to spit all round the room, the bed, the walls, the floor, so I gave her a jam jar to spit in. When she fills it up I empty it. Then I put her in the bathtub, she takes the soap and I hold the shower head while she washes. I dress her, 'timaha jid iigu bixi' part my hair" she says, and then she ties it in two plaits. I take her down stairs for porridge. She drinks her "coffee" really its milk with a little bit of hot chocolate, while I mop the room and take the sheets up. She's not incontinent, she can find the toilet as long as the bathroom light is on, but when she coughs or spits she makes a little mistake and lets some piss loose. She'll be downstairs till lunchtime and then she'll go back up and start her chatting with her people, with her other universe people. Depending on what mood she is in, she might complain to them about my mum, or she might complain about her father, or her brother

- he died a long time ago - but its 'Yusef-o, Yusef-o' all day long and 'our animals, goats, sheep, have all died because you can't be bothered to look after them. You have ambitions, I know you think you are above being an animal herder, you want to go to Mogadishu eh? but what are we to eat in the meantime?' and blaming him for their poverty. We're talking seventy years ago, when the Italians ran Mogadishu and thee south and the British ran Somaliland in the north, but in her universe its now. At least the world in her head is bigger than the little room that's now her final home before jannah, the garden.

She'll be talking politics with them, oh yeah she's political, chatting about 'Somalis and their stupidity', Na'as! about Said Barre and all what he did, all that he gave away and all that was lost in the civil war and how 'we are now nomads again with no boundaries and no place to call home', about the Americans and how they use the world and how she had a message from Allah to warn them that it will all crumble about their ears - 'wallahi, billahi,

talahi!' that's what she says, and then back to her brother, 'Yusefo!, Yusefo!. Na-as! Na-as!'.

This morning she was chatting to someone else in her little universe. I couldn't make out who. Someone new - from her past. 'Koofil, koofil' 'Jiljiladiyo seedaha tukay'. I don't know. Couldn't understand the Somali she was speaking, old style, proper Somali from the time before our language was even written down. In those days the nomads communicated by passing on messages in poems from person to person, mouth to mouth.

She's quiet now, the night seems to calm her, but she only sleeps for a short time. She'll call for a drink 'abitaan isi' because all that chatting makes her thirsty.

I sit down and turn on the TV. It's calm in the house at this time. The living room actually looks okay, all the crap oversized furniture that might have fitted a mansion back in Mogadishu but only crowds out all free space here in our two up, two down trashy council house, shrinks and

softens in the night shadows. I can relax.

I switch over from the Somali cable channels, always full of famine and killings and bombings, clips of Mogadishu rubble, trucks carrying scary men with guns, some in uniform, some in macawis, full pelt through the streets and then endless interviews with intellectuals in exile in Canada and Switzerland, doctor this, professor this, who got out with their money, babbling on about Al Shabaab this, Al Shabaab that, sharia courts Al Quada in the Horn of Africa this and that. Lining themselves up to be the future government, lining their pockets with dollars, paying off the warlords they are connected to so they can buy more guns to kill whoever is left - those poor folk that couldn't get out when the war started. Fuck off! I turn to the news and let it wash over me, I'm tired and my eyes only register talking heads and 30 second clips, the news items going round and round every ten minutes. Same old, same old. My eyes only pull into focus to read the ticker tape at the bottom of the screen. Breaking news,

dot, dot dot breaking news dot, dot dot. 'President Obama to make a statement at any minute regarding an issue of national security from the East Room of the White House' dot, dot dot. 'My sources have told me that it's something of the highest importance, this is a dramatic development'. Okay. I'm hooked. 'Several sources in the administration have told me that the United States has the body of Osama Bin Laden'. What the fuck! 'Everyone will remember this moment - where were you when President Kennedy was shot, when Richard Nixon resigned, when John Lennon was murdered, when the twin towers came down, where were you when you learned, after nearly ten years of hunting him down, that the mastermind of Al Quada, Osama Bin Laden was killed?' And then Barack Obama, the blessed one himself.

WE SEE OBAMA ON TV AND HEAR HIM ANNOUNCE:

'Good Evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world, the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama Bin laden, the leader of al

Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, woman and children. Last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community I was briefed on a possible lead to Bin Laden. We had located Bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound. No Americans were harmed. After a firefight, they killed Osama Bin Laden and took custody of his body'.

SUUBAN: Switch to crowds outside the White House. 'USA! USA!

"USA!"

No Americans were harmed. After a firefight, they killed Osama Bin Laden and took custody of his body. I felt sorry for the man. I turned off the telly and went to bed feeling sorry for the man. Imagining his martyr's body laid out someplace - in the custody of the USA. I tell you I felt sorry for the man. I felt nothing when they caught Saddam Hussain down that hole, cowardly evil murdering bastard, but Bin Laden. Miskin. Wallahi. I felt sorry for him.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

3 May 2011 Woolwich, south London. The following morning

I got up the next morning, feeling down, not wanting to turn on the telly, wanting to avoid all the gloating and arselicking by Cameron. Why should it be that the Americans always get their man? Eventually. Inevitably. Che Guavara, Lumumba, Malcolm X, probably even Arafat. All of them nailed. Apart from Fidel Castro I suppose. Who probably wishes he had died young - sucking on a poisoned Havana cigar.

Mother was all about it, on the phone -landline and mobile simultaneously - to her mates: 'The Emir isn't dead, wallahi listen to what I am saying, he isn't dead. Well if he is in the next world, it wasn't the Americans who killed him, he likely died years ago, he had kidney problem didn't he? He had to have dialysis every day. Even in the caves. Where's the body? Exactly, where's the body. Where's the

body Khadra?’

Well, whether he was dead or not this was definitely an excuse for a jad session. In between discussing those ‘lying America bastardos’ hooyo was also on the phone to her drug dealer in east London, making sure that a box of fresh jad bundles, hot off the plane from Yemen or Kenya at Heathrow that afternoon, would have her name on it. Setting up someone man to pick it up from a mushraf in Plumstead to which the box would be delivered around five o’clock and bring it to her door in good time. Her treat tonight. So inbetween looking after ayeeyo, I had to mop the frontroom, push the furniture to the wall creating that little bit of extra space on the floor for people to sit on rugs their backs resting on the settee with their stick of jad, their cups of Somali coffee, the kitchen roll to spit the chewed leaves in and the dhuxul burner for the smoky perfumed uunsi, attempting to recreate those leisurely, cool, trendy afternoons in Mogadishu before the war when mother, who in those days was slim, beautiful and important and loved,

would entertain the same girlfriends - whose fat arses would be coming round later to our Woolwich dump - to a session of jad, tape cassettes of old Somali love songs to rock, clap and sing along to and endless gossip about Said Barre - who was in favour, who was out of favour and who had been thrown into prison without trial. Behaving like they were Gods looking down as the little people's lives were wrecked, not realising in their civilised stupidity and shortsightedness that the clock was ticking towards disaster and ruin for them too. 'Asalaamalekum wa ramatullah a barakat, macaan, iska waran darling?' 'Walecum asalaam habibti'. 'Say wallah hey! Maya- say wallah hey!' Maya! Maya! I needed to make a lot of room for those fat arses.

Later that night and the jad session is in full flow.

Most times I enjoy listening in on their all night conversations, but I feel restless tonight. I'm supposed to be on kitchen duty, boiling the coffee and stoking up the uunci when the hot coals go dim.

I half listen as sim cards are swapped, phone calls are made, intercontinental opinions chewed over and historical facts checked, suspended just for a minute at two o'clock when my brother Guuled arrives from a night out doing Allah knows what with his bros, wannabe gangsters, shit heads and crack dealers the lot of them. He slides his head round the door 'asalaam aleycum ladies'. He wants to strike up a conversation about Bin Laden's death, but no-one is interested in small talk about the American shaytaan at this point, and he soon goes upstairs to his bedroom.

Later I think I can hear ayeeyo finding her way to the bathroom and I wonder if one of the jad crew might have switched the light off. I slip upstairs, but she's OK, the lights on and she's making her way back to her room, all the time chatting, chatting, well plugged into her universe tonight.

Ayeeyo spots me coming up the stairs. She knows who I am these days. 'Suuban. Suuban. The askeri are coming again. Allah has told me. The askeri will be hear soon, be safe my

dear'. Ayeeyo, what soldiers are you talking about? I think that watching the rolling news this morning about Bin Laden has agitated her and found its way into her universe.

There's no soldiers ayeeyo. Hiya. It's okay ayeeyo. 'But my mother says the askeri will be here soon' she says. 'Hooyo says they will not leave us alone until Koofil has been avenged'. She grips me with her bird-like hand and says 'the Cabbe Sayid's words has severed the Ingrisi's honour.

I begin to learn about the Sayid that night, I gulp it down like a jug of (c)anno-geel, and like that magical camel milk it gives my body and soul goodness and brings me closer to the earth. I thirst for more.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

May 2011 the next morning Woolwich

I bring ayeeyo downstairs the next morning, sit her on the corner of the sofa and give her anjeero - Ethiopian bread we Somali's love - and her coffee while I clear the leftover jad stalks, ashtrays and coffee cups from last night. I finish and sit down on the chair opposite her, and stare at her. 'All the duas are with her" - the full meaning of my father's words begin to be revealed to me. Before my father gave me that talking to, I used to pretend my grandmother didn't exist - walaahi -in fact I kind of trained my eyes to dissolve her little hunched bony body until I could look straight through her. She didn't have any possessions by the time came to live with us, she wasn't a jewelry person, she had no gold, just her clothes, her attar and her kitab, the Qu'ran, so if she had actually disappeared, or died, there would be nothing left to prove

she ever existed at all in this world even as she was travelling to the next to join "Yusef-o" and scold him face to face. Waxhba. Nothing.

Nothing, except the folded crumbling ancient sheet of paper that I am holding in my lap as I sit opposite her. My mother tipped me off last night that I would find it sitting between the pages of ayeeyo's kitab. When she finishes eating I reach across and wipe her mouth clean with a corner of my nightdress. I carefully unfold the paper and put it in front of her lined face. Ayeeyo - who is this? Can you tell me? I know already it is a faded watercolour sketch of her mother, my great grandmother, Hibak Jamaac Shabeele. A Darwiish, dervish soldier in the army of the sayid Maxamud Cabdille Xassan, the Mad Mullah as the British called him, who from 1900 fought a twenty year guerilla war against British occupation of Somalia. But I need to know more. The two of us silently absorb the image of a woman Darwiish - dervish warrior - Hibak Jamaac Shabeele, sitting on a small horse, drawn rearing up on its

hind legs. She is dressed in loose white cloth and leather sandals, ammunition belts criss-crossing her chest, a dagger in her belt, right arm holding a rifle above her head. She is wearing her long hair loose, frizzed up in a wild kinky afro and parted in the middle. Her fierce face stares out at us both. On the back of the sketch is a date, November 1916. A signature 'Emil Kirsch'.

Ayeeyo searches her childhood memories and the voice of her mother begins to speak to her. Ayeeyo opens her mouth and her universe flows out of her to engulf me. Her mother speaks to me now.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

British Somaliland 1913

Hoodi hoodi? Waa ina Jaamac Shabele, Hibak Jamaac

Shabele. (pause)

[In English:] May I enter? I am Hibak Jamaac Shabele,
daughter of Jamaac Shabele. I used to be of the Isaq Habr
Awal clan from Gabiley, west of Hargisa.

I have a pony, a carbine and a dagger. When I gallop in
front of the darwiish lines, taunting the enemy before
battle, I, Hibak Jamaac Shabele, from the people born by
the river, am visible to all. At that moment I am alive,
even though I know that if Allah wills it, soon I may be
dead.

I say to you all now, before this battle at Black Land, I
am not of the Dolbahanta, nor of the Warsangeli, nor of the
Isak, nor of the Mijertin, nor of the Ogaden. I am a

dervish, I hope only for God's mercy and consent and forgiveness and guidance. My only allegiance is to the Sayid and to jihad - that we may, insha Allah, drive the British into the sea and that this country and the true Muslims within it may be victorious. I wish that when Allah gazes at me, he sees not my Somaliness, nor my sex, nor my clan, he sees but a holy fighter.

When I began to follow the Sayid Maxamud Cabdille Xassan and become part of his dervish army I began my life again in the service of Allah subhana wa tallah. It wasn't a sacrifice, it was a release from a life made small by the British and their collaborators - the clan leaders who signed the treaties with them, allowing them to rule over us in our own land.

I had heard that a holy man, a sheik, had returned from Sudan and that he was a follower of the radical Sudanese sufi Mohammed ibn Saleh. I would hear the men of my clan, as they sat chewing their jad in the still of the afternoon talking about this holy man and how he was acting as a

peacemaker between the different clans. Even then, I remember one old hajji saying "it won't be long before the Ingrissi begin to notice him".

Everyone has their point from which there can be no return. When Allah forces them to embrace their destiny. Mine? One day I was travelling through Berbera and passed by the French Christian orphanage. I stop to talk to a young boy sitting on the step, and upon asking what his name is - "magaca?" receive the reply 'magaca gu wa John Abdullahi'. John! When I ask him what clan he is from the boy replies, 'the clan of the French fathers'. Ohdibillah! Shaytaan. I went home and beseeched the elders: "Are you content to be ruled by the British, the Italians and Abyssinians; that under our noses our young people are being washed of their Somaliness"? Later I heard the Sayid arguing 'the infidels have destroyed our religion and made our children their children'. Sar! He is right I thought. I had no children of my own or husband to look after. What people considered my curse became my reward. I left Gabiley and found my way to

the Sayid's contact in Hargeisa and from there to the ranks of the Darwiish army.

It was not long before the British decided to act - they went after the Sayid's livestock and that of all those clans that followed him. The ingrissi hoped to starve us into submission and to provoke the sayid out into the open where they could defeat him and complete their mission to seize all our land and rename all our children.

Haji Sudi - our Sayid's trusted soldier, once worked for the British. Then he was known as Ahmed Warsama, before he joined the jihad. He knows how these devils think. After they had been hunting for our leopard, our lion and our antelope, the British officers, served with food and alcohol by their Somali lackeys, would sit around and tell each other what they thought of us:

"He has got an excellent opinion of himself and his abilities and nothing on earth will convince him to the contrary. Each man is his own Sultan!"

"I knew a Somali shot by the enemy, then speared in five places. The spear ripped up his abdomen and let out twelve feet of gut. This man crawled from twelve noon under a blazing sun, stark naked and trailing his gut behind him, until 5pm when he was attended to. He survived!"

The British believed that by some magic that their slaves could not hear them, but every word stuck in their memories, a shame they could not shake. The weak began to believe what their masters said of them, but others like Haji Sudi shook themselves from the spell. I believe that Allah placed these ideas about us in the heads of the British, so that when they meet us in battle they are disheartened to find out that we Darwiish are in fact the opposite of that which they believed us to be. At that moment the advantage lies with us to crush them, whatever the cost to our side.

They have tried many times to defeat us. The Ingressi scattered rifles like seeds amongst those clans they had perverted to their cause. Only death grew from this crop,

as those the British armed, too cowardly to confront our army, turned instead to looting and butchering the weak. The farmers fled from the land livestock and famine took their place - taking the lives of every third person in the north. We named it "the time of eating filth" - for those who survived did so only by eating rats and other haram flesh.

Asalamaleecum wa ramatullah a barkatu brothers and sisters.

We are today on the field of battle here at Dul Madobe - the Black Land. The British have a new commander - Richard Corfield. Koofil we call him. The British government are preparing for a great war with Germany and the Ottoman caliphate, and are distracted. Our spies tell us that Koofil yearns to break the peace treaty, defeat us and declare victory before his masters in London become wise to his scheme. His forces have been attacking those clans who are with us. We also have raided and slaughtered men, women and children of those clans who are against us. We know this bloodshed and cruelty will never be forgotten. [aside]

What will become of Somalis if the battle to unite us all
gives birth to its opposite?

[pause]

ACT 2 SCENE 2

Woolwich May 2011

...Bang, bang, bang on the door, the door opening, angry
murmering growing into a full scale row. My brother
Guuled's deep pleading voice cut across by my hooyo's
highpitched babble. 'Hooyo, hooyo, listen to me please - I
didn't mean for this to happen. Believe me'. What has the
fucking pain in the arse done now? Crashed the car? Got
into a fight? Got his on-the-quiet white girlfriend up the
spout? I strain my ears to tune into this jarring penny
opera, but I can't make it out.

An Ingressi man's voice draws me back to Hibak's world.

*'Berbera: August 5th 1913. Darling motheresy. I am in
Berbera but thank goodness I go out this afternoon. Just at
present it is the most unbearable spot. Very hot, a 108 in
the shade or more and cursed beyond most places in the
world by what is called the 'kariff' a wind that drives
before it all the dust in the world and when it is in its
most barbaric humour, sweeps tent shelters and everything
except a house into space.*

I shall be leaving Berbera with the Camel Constabulary under Mr Corfield. I think he intends to take the Mullah on although we are under instruction from the politicians at home not to engage him other than in self-defence. I fear I may not have time to post this letter until I return from this expedition. Your loving son Tommy'.

'We will post it for you Tommy, I promise it will reach England before you do' and everyone laughs. To distract those of us who cannot sleep Haji Sudi is translating the letters I found in the soldier's pockets. 'Here is one from his mother'.

'My darling Tommy, we think so much about you. I feel so anxious. I am afraid it is a horrid place. I don't suppose you shall do much, as to pursue the Mullah must be an expensive job. I truly pray this may be the case and that you will soon be home'.

I killed Tommy. It was magrib, but the light from the full moon allowed me to see him coming from a long way off. I think he must have been riding between the British positions, carrying a message from Koofil to another officer. He most likely become confused in the bush and lost his direction. He galloped straight towards me. I shot him and as he swayed in the saddle, I jumped in front of

his horse, speared him through the throat and pulled him to the ground. He gripped my legs and would not let go. His blue eyes looked up at me like those of a wounded leopard in surprise that his end had come so soon and in such a manner and such a place. I whispered in his ear the Shahada: *Ashadu alla ilaha il-lallahu, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadun abduhu wa Rasullullah* so that he would be ready to meet God, and I could see his lips move. I think he was trying to repeat my words, but no sound came. It was not until he was dead that I was able to release myself from his embrace. I searched his pockets and his saddlebag, found the message he was carrying and the letters that Haji Sudi is now reading out to us. Here is another letter from his mother' says Haji Sudi. 'Ahh, she was a wise woman'.

'My precious boy, it must be awful not knowing who is near you. Do avoid the bush, it is a premium on the enemy to meet him there. I think of my poor darling little boy in Africa. ...your devoted mother who prays always for your success and safety'.

'Avoid the bush!' says Haji. 'Wallahi, she understands our tactics, the advantage we have when we lure them into a fight on our own ground. If only she had been born a Somali she surely would have joined the darwiish and been one of

our commanders in the field!' Everyone laughs. Haji Sudi catches my eye. 'Put the letters back in his pocket' he says. 'Take his body and place it where his comrades will find it'.

I turn away. I feel sorry for the hooyo, wallahi I do. She will never see her wiilkada again in this world. I imagine I see her face in her son's eyes as he clung to me. *Inna lillahi was inna ilaihi rajioon* - from Allah we come and to him we shall return. A while later, as the sun rises I hear warnings come from our lookouts, and the cries that will carry us into battle and strike terror in the hearts of our enemies erupt from our lines: 'Shiikh Mahammed Saalih! Shiikh Mahammed Saalih! The sayyid's orders crowd my mind - 'you must kill the Maxim machine gunner, only then can we hope to succeed insha Allah'.

'War maxaad tiri? Yaah, boliis aah MI5 heedhe, doroogona ma tiri? Downstairs, in the kitchen, my mother is spitting out hot curses at my brother. So slowly and not a little wearily I press my finger against ayeeyo's lips, shut the door of her room and make my way downstairs. Guuled is

cowering in the corner by the fridge, flinching as the curses lash him.

'Alla ba'ayeey oo hoogay. Alla mantay godkeygu biyo igu soo galeen. Alla tolbeelayeey, alla ba'ayeey war heedhe duli yahow, damiirkaadu mee'ey? War allow cadaabtii kugu raagi? Oo cudur xumi kugu dhac. War iimaanka alla kaa qaad, kaaba qaadaye'eh. Illaahow noo soo salah. You fucking idiot!'

'Hooyo, I'm sorry, wallahi I am. I didn't know what to do' and then he breaks down, sobbing, sobbing, sobbing. I calm my mother down and gradually I get the full story. Guuled and two of his "bros" have been dealing crack cocaine out of an empty council flat in a tower block, which is under the name of one of our aunts, Doodie. In the early hours of the morning, one of their regular addicts, a total headcase called Michael Lee buzzes them and asks them if he can come up - he wanted to score some rocks. As soon as he is through the flat door he pulls a kitchen knife, one of those Gordon Ramsey likes to wave around, and attacks the

three boys. Guuled is slashed across the arm, but another of the boys who tackled Lee is stabbed to death, cut to pieces as far as I could tell from Guuled's description. As he slashed and stabbed, Lee had been screaming lunatic accusations at the three boys: 'You fucking Somalians, you want to ruin my country, you want to blow up my country, you want to sell drugs in my country. This is what you get'. Someone in another flat in the block, hearing the shouting and screaming, calls the police, who smash their way in and taser Lee before he can kill Guuled and the other boy.

Guuled is taken by ambulance to the hospital in Woolwich and stitched up. He is understandably in shock and his only thought is how to get home, but instead he is taken from A & E to the police station and put in an interview room. He thinks he is just there to make a statement, but instead a plain clothes walks into the room. He sits across from Guuled with a piece of paper, he says it is Lee's statement. He reads some out to Guuled. 'Lee says here 'I

did it because the Somalians were Al Quada. They wanted me to be a suicide bomber and blow up Bluewater shopping centre. I told them I wouldn't do it, even though they said I would go to heaven and get loads of virgins. That's why I attacked them, I was trying to stop them doing a terrorist attack on Britain and killing English people". Guuled's brain explodes - was this murdering fucking psycho-savage really trying to make himself into a hero, by making out that the dead boy, Guuled and the other guy are terrorists? The plain clothes asks Guuled - 'any comment? If not they will have to raid his house, arrest his family, and take away their PCs, check their emails and internet history, check their immigration status. They would find out if he, or any of his family, were extremists connected to a wider conspiracy. 'It our duty to do this. Unless of course, you have anything to say, or anything or anyone you want to mention. How do you feel about Bin Laden - do you think it's good that he's dead or do you think he was a bit of a superstar really?'

Guuled's world goes very dark. 'I'm just a drug dealer', he tells the plain clothes. 'I don't know anything about Al Quada, or Al Shabaab, I've never been to Afghanistan, or Iraq, or Pakistan, or even Somalia. I don't give a fuck what happened to that twat Bin Laden - it's got nothing to do with me. I don't go to the mosque, and I haven't even got a beard'. 'So you have nothing to tell me then?'

[sighs] No-one you want to tell us about, anyone who may be harbouring extremist ideas, talked about Al Quada, been watching jihadi vidoes or acting strangely - maybe become more religious recently, praying five times a day, growing a beard and wearing Arab dress?' And then a little spot of light opens up for Guuled, he understood what they want from him - a name, a fucking name.

So he gives them a name, not of a religious nut, but the name of a Somali boy from a rival drug gang - and just for good measure, a different clan - who had crossed him once on some poxy drug deal back in the day. My weakminded and weaksouled brother Guuled thought he was being clever,

giving up a name so that they would release him, but the name of someone who could easily prove he was not a terrorist.

The plain clothes gives him the bus fare home and lets him out the back of the police station. Guuled does not go home though, he goes to a jad house, a mushraf in town, and sits on the bare floor. Down amongst the shriveled stalks, with the old boys, schoolteachers, truck drivers and businessmen in another life, now burnt out through lack of food and sleep, hidden in the shadows, he goes to sleep. It was there that he got a phone call tipping him off that he was being looked for. The guy whose name he had given up, Ahmed Aden, had had his family home raided, his mother cuffed while armed police went from room by room, tearing everything apart. During a break in interrogation the guy's solicitor asks the police where they had got their intelligence from, and from the officer's reply she puts two and two together and whispers it in the ear of her client.

In the kitchen, all three of us stand silent as the inevitable sinks in. The word is out, and soon Guuled will be found, and when they catch him, he knows, I know, my mother knows, they will probably beat him to death. Which is why our mum is now on the phone, frantically ringing relatives. As I drag myself up the stairs to look in on ayeeyo, I feel nothing but dread. I wonder what we have done to bring this catastrophe on our heads. We had tried so hard to be good Muslims. I hear my mother on the phone, doing what comes naturally - getting rid of the problem by any means necessary and then pretending it never happened. 'He needs to get out of the country. I'm going to ask Abdirahman to drive him to Harwich so he can get the ferry to Hook of Holland. We have relatives in Amsterdam. I'm going to phone them now. They can buy him a ticket to Mombasa and then his uncle can get him over the border into Somalia.'

A cry of despair escapes from Guuled. 'Hooyo - I don't want to go to Somalia. I won't survive there. I'll kill myself'.

'Good', mother says 'do that' and then she's back on the phone: 'I need someone's passport - how about your boy? He's about Guuled's age, they do look similar and anyhow you know they think we all look the same. Jazackalair Khadra. You will be rewarded for this insha Allah. I'm phoning a cab now Khadra, I'm coming to pick it up. [pause] I'm sending him to Berbera'.

[pause]

Berbera...where the kariff sweeps everything, and everyone, into space.

ACT 3 SCENE 1

May 2011 Woolwich

I sit back on ayeeyos's bed and try and shut Guuled's whiney voice out of my head. I hold her hands. She looks at me. Tell me about your hooyo, Hibak Jamaac Shabele. What did she tell you about Koofil and Dul Madoobe?

'We killed Koofil' she says. She re-enters her universe and her mother speaks directly to me.

At daybreak two thousand of us attack with rifles and spears. The enemy circle round to form a defensive formation, a zariba, with the Maxim gun facing our advance. Bang Bang We concentrate all our fire on the Maxim

We shoot the gunner

Others rush to replace him. Daarwiish fall beside me, in front of me.

The Maxim is jammed - the cry goes up on our side. Shouts of joy!

Suddenly I see a white officer run towards the gun and struggle with it. He pulls it. And kicks it. He jumps on it.

I take aim at him.

Next to me a brother drops, knocking my rifle from my hands. His blood spurts down my white costume.

I look up and the white officer is down. More cheers go up on our side [cheers]

It was not until after the battle that we found out from prisoners that we had shot Koofil through the head.

[Pause as the death of Corfield and victory for the Darwiish sinks into Suuban]

Then three hundred Dolbahante in the ranks of the British, seeing that Koofil was dead ran away taking the ammunition with them. Fulay!

That was not the end of the battle, we fought them for another five hours until they had been all but wiped out.

They had taken nearly half of us with them. At midday we had to withdraw because we had run out of ammunition and from afar we could see the survivors burying their dead. The shallow graves were heaped with any stones they could find in the hope that the hyenas and carrion birds would not uncover the corpses. We allowed them to retreat so that they could carry news of their defeat, and our victory, back to their commanders. Later on the sayid walked amongst the graves of the enemy. I remember him calling out for his verse memoriser to come to his side. 'Hussain Faarah Dhiqle - I have a gabay for you. Listen well and remember what I say, for I want this to be recited far and wide, to every clan who has joined with the infidel. I want these verses to make their way to the British government itself'. He kicked at a grave, 'Remember my brothers in Islam - meel aunun dhagax tuuris gaarin, hadal baa gaara - stones cannot go far, but words can'. I name this the Battle of the Ruuglab - the Knee Bending.

Then he begins:

Adaa Koofilow jiiitayoon, dunida joogeyne

You, Koofil, take heed, for you are no longer of this earth

Adigaa jidkii lagugu wadi, jimic la'aaneede

And are without companions on the road to the next world

Jahannamo la geeyow haddaad, aakhirow jihato

When hell dweller, you are face the hereafter

[The sayyid stops, cups an ear and bends towards the
ground]

"I can hear Koofil complain!"

[he resumes the poem]

Jiidhkaygiina bahalbaa cunoo, jiiitay hilibkii dheh

Say, wild animals ate my flesh and tore the meat from me

Jurmidiyo baruurtii dhurwaa, jugux ka siiyaa dheh

The sound the hyena makes as it swallows the thick flesh
and fat

Jiljiladiyo seedaha tukay, igaga jaaseen dheh

Say, the crows have plucked my sinews and divided me up

If truth be told, my kinsmen are defeated

Say, they were ambushed and scattered

Say, the dervish are like the advancing thunderbolts of a
storm, rumbling and roaring.

The poem hit me like a thunderbolt. It shook me to my core,
lodged in the marrow of my bones and fused with my very
soul. The Sayid, Hibak, Haji Sudi, the darwiish, had killed
Corfield, had beaten the British in battle, and now our

great poet, my great poet, was reveling in it. His bloody, triumphant words were now rolling around my ayeeyo's mouth, budding on her lips, bursting into the air, showering me. It was possible to beat them. The face of Guled appears before me - I want to tell him 'The age of heroes is long past - I witnessed the last one, who in triumph did not need to draw down the word of Allah, subhana watallah - he could spin the words of man - our people's words, into winding sheets of pure gold. I have witnessed it, I heard it. It happened.

Act 3 Scene 2

Woolwich May 2011

'Suuban - where the fuck are you? What is it with you and ayeeyo? Come downstairs, I'm starving, cook something for me you lazy bitch'.

Guuled's voice leaks into my consciousness, and damps down to a glow the fire that the poem has sparked in me. I walk downstairs, push past my brother, go in the kitchen, open the freezer and take out some meat to thaw.

Guuled stands in the doorway, pretending to watch me preparing a meal - hilib and baris. We are alone - mother is out getting the false passport for him to travel on.

Finally he speaks - 'Suuban, you haven't said anything about the trouble I'm in'. I don't reply. 'There's no point you pretending that it's nothing to do with you. It will come to this door you know'. 'Not if you're not here it wont'. 'I'm not going to Berbera or any other shit-hole in Somalia, I don't care what mum says. It will fuck me up big

time'. He pauses before he gets down to it. 'You know Ahmed Aden's sister Zahara, don't you?' I don't bother to reply because it's not a question. 'Ahmed, or his mates, will be here soon, and after he's finished with me it will be your and mum's turn. You know that. It's the Somali way.

[SUUBAN ASIDE] 'No it's not'.

He starts sobbing, not at the thought of me and mum getting it, but out of self-pity. 'Please, please walaasha, talk to Zahara for me. Tell her that you want to speak to her brother. Tell him that I'm sorry for giving his name to the pigs, that I had no choice and that I didn't mean to get him or his family in trouble'. He sinks to his knees, grabs me and, tears flowing down his face, looks up at me, begging me to help him. 'Tell Ahmed I'll do anything to make it right - I'll tell the police that I made a mistake, that I lied, that he's not involved with the jihadis. I'll tell them whatever he wants me to say. You can do it, you can help me. Talk to Zahara, please, please Suuban'. I despise every atom in his body. I feel sick at the smell of

his fear.

Fulay I say. He stops sobbing. 'what?' he says. I said you're a coward, a spineless fucking coward and I hate you. This is not what he want to hear. What did you think would happen? I say to him. Selling drugs, ripping people off, mixing with scum. And now you bring it to our door and you want me to help you? He slumps back in the corner. I take some time to think.

[Suuban reaches for her hijab]

EPILOGUE PRESENT DAY

OUTSIDE A MASJID IN LONDON

Two years have passed since Guuled asked me to sort his shit out. And now ayeeyo is on her way to the afterlife to finally meet Yusefo and Hibak. And all of them. But not Koofil - trust me - VIP place in hell for him.

Guuled is in Somalia. He used to phone mum every so often, but that soon stopped. Maybe mum is getting news in him from our relatives out there, but she doesn't tell me anything.

A couple of weeks back I got an email from him. He wrote:

'As salaam aleycum wa ramatullah a barakatu [Suuban raises her eyebrows, as if to indicate he has gone religious].

Sister, I am okay, in case you were wondering. I miss you all, and I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused you. I know that Ahmed Aden was the last person that you wanted to talk

to, because of what happened between you two in the past. I knew all about it, but I didn't reckon you would appreciate me knowing, so I kept my mouth shut. I'm not in Berbera anymore, I'm in the south. I can't tell you anymore than that. You should come out here. I'll contact you soon, but not by email. Talk soon sister, insha Allah. Waleycum a salaam.

Insha Allah.

[WE HEAR OFF THE END OF THE JANNAZAH PRAYER]

Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!

SUUBAN: The janazzah prayers are at an end. Ayeeyo's body will be driven to the Muslim cemetery. The men will gather round the slit in the ground. She will be gently lowered by three pairs of hands and placed resting on her right side facing Makkah. A white man sits in a yellow digger waiting

for the prayers to finish and then he scoops up the earth and fills the grave in. He pats it down with a spade and sticks a piece of wood with a number in the ground by her feet. No headstone, no flowers, just a number. Will anybody visit her to say prayers over her? I don't know. Her journey is over. Mine begins, Insha 'allah. We Somalis are like jinn. Always on the move.

Let me give you some advice. Your greatest enemy is always the one your arrogance has rendered invisible.

Only two Europeans ever set eyes on the Sayid Maxamud Cabdille Xasan during all those twenty years that he led the darwiish. The first was an emissary of the Italian government sent to agree a peace treaty with the Sayid. The only other white man was a German engineer Emil Kirsch - hired by the Sayid to repair the darwiish rifles. He spent ten months in the darwiish headquarters, living and working among them, until terrified out of his wits by the Sayid he ran away and died a terrible death in the desert. It was rumoured that he had secretly taken a wife amongst the

daarwish and that she had a child by him, but no-one could say for sure.

And the Sayid? He died in 1920, in his bed. Struck down by the influenza that took millions of lives that year across the globe. He was buried in a hidden place the British would never find. Will never find. They can't dig him up and scatter his bones for the crows to pick at, or zip him up in a bodybag, weigh him down, slide him overboard a warship for the crabs to eat.

[she adjusts her hijab and goes to leaves. She turns back].

SUUBAN: My name is Suuban. I am not of the Dolbahanta, nor of the Warsangeli, nor of the Isak, nor of the Mijertin, nor of the Ogaden. I hope only for God's mercy and consent and forgiveness and guidance.

My name is Suuban. Its meaning? 'The righteous one who is without guilt or sin'.

[SUUBAN LEAVES THE STAGE. THE BUSKER PLAYS. BLACKOUT]. **END**