

Born into Bondage Yet Unbound: A Short Story

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In December sometime in the 1990s at 9:00 PM, Tom and Linda stood at an arrival gate of the Saint Paul/Minneapolis Airport. Both were holding up cardboard signs with “Cigaal Family” written on them. As the passengers streamed by them, Tom and Linda stole glances at each other but otherwise kept to themselves. They were awaiting the arrival of a Somali refugee family to Minnesota via Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. Though this was not their first assignment as resettlement workers, they were nervous, but did not talk to each other about it. Certain things were rather kept to oneself. They knew anything could have gone wrong. The family could easily have missed one of their flights and could have been anywhere but not in Minneapolis. As time ticked on, their nervousness grew, gnawing at them.

“We’re not even sure if they arrived in Chicago,” Tom said.

“At least we know this is the right gate for the flight, and that they left Kenya twenty something hours ago. Anyway, we should just wait here,” said Linda.

“We know the flight has arrived,” said Tom.

“Wait a minute. Let me get the list of names out,” said Linda. As she dropped her cardboard sign and began digging in her purse, a middle-aged man and a young boy emerged from the walkway. The man was wearing a simple business suit and the boy was dressed in a lightweight shirt and cotton trousers. Behind them, a young girl, appropriately dressed for the weather, ran to catch up with them. Trailing behind was a Somali woman wearing a red and black diric, brown shawl with matching sweater, head scarf, and jewelry. The woman was pushing a child in a stroller, and behind her tightly clinging to her hem was a small girl.

“Hey, Linda look, look, look,” Tom suddenly yelled.

Papers in her hand, Linda looked up, lifted the cardboard sign from the floor and raised it up. She gave a quick glance over to Tom whose hand was up already. The man approached.

“Are you the Cigaal family?” Linda asked.

“Yes,” the children answer in unison.

“Who speaks English?” Linda asked.

The youngest of the two girls lightened up, smiling, and letting go of her mother’s hem she stepped forward while the others kept their distance. She came closer, looked up at Linda and said, “me.”

“My name is Linda. Welcome to Minneapolis,” Linda said. She put the cardboard sign and list of names--letter in one hand and extended the other in greeting.

"I am; my name is Ardo," said the little girl, taking her hand in hers.

"Hello, Adruu?"

"No, Arrrrrrdoooooooooooooo," she corrected Linda. The other kids giggled.

"Arrrrrrrrrrrrdooo. Is that better now?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe? You are a little toughie, Ardu, aren't you? You're going to have to teach me how to say your name, right?"

"Maybe,"

"Well, I will try to do my best, OK?"

"OK?"

"And this is Tom," Linda said.

"Hi, Ardo, nice to meet-" said Tom.

But Ardo had already moved on. She held her father's right hand up, placed it on her shoulder and said, "Here is my dad, his name is Cigaal, he is old, old, I said old, maybe one hundred years old, maybe more."

Everyone laughed except the father.

“This is my *Hooyo*, Faayow. She is younger than my dad but not much. She is sixty,” she continued. Again giggles erupted from the other children. The mother did not look to be more than thirty.

“Yes,” said the older sister, “Ardo is funny. My name is Abyan; my brother here is Aykar. Ardo told you her name already and the youngest here is Bayle. This is my father, Cigaal. He is not one hundred years...”

“He is and he does not speak,” interrupted Ardo. “Abyan is thirteen, my brother Aykar is ten and the youngest who is sleeping in the stroller is three and I am five.”

“Why doesn’t your father speak?” Linda asked.

“I don’t know, but it makes my mom sad,” said Ardo.

Linda and Tom shook hands with everybody. Linda motioned to the family to follow her. They walked, heading toward the luggage carousel. When they reached the baggage claim area, Abyan shyly approached Linda and quietly shared with her that all three children had been fortunate to attend school in Kenya. In a voice just above a whisper, she said that she remembered a lot about her father--that he was a physician in Somalia; that he had gone to medical school both in Somalia and in the U.S.; and that he had saved enough money to make it possible for them to live in Nairobi rather than in a refugee camp.

Suddenly, the mother in a panic, interrupted their conversation. “*Aabbehiin aaway, Aabbehiin aaway, Aabbehiin aawa?*” she yelled, frantically looking all around.

“What is she saying? What is she saying?” Both Tom and Linda startled in response.

“She is asking where my father is. Oh my God, where is my father? Where is my father?” asked Abyan, in terror.

Tom dashed off toward the north wing of the airport, Abyan on his heels. He spotted Cigaal among a small group of passengers about to enter an elevator, and yelled, “Please hold that elevator, anybody, please hold that elevator!”

Abyan, dodging and weaving through the crowd, shouted, “Aabo sug, aabo sug [wait, Dad; wait, Dad].”

Tom quickly reached Cigaal, and grabbing him by his right arm, was able to safely pull him away from the closing elevator door. Cigaal looked confused and showed no reaction to what had just transpired. Abyan who was right behind, seized her father’s other arm.

Tom asked, “Where was he going? No, no, don’t answer that. It’s a stupid question,” he responded to himself. “Does he do this often?” he asked inadvertently. “Don’t answer that either,” he followed.

Making it safely out of the airport and into their waiting van, the group arrived somewhere in a Minnesota suburb where they stopped in front of a 1960’s rambler style house.

“This is your new home,” Linda said as she stepped out of the van. The children quickly exited right behind her and

rushed into the house while Tom and Linda unloaded the luggage. Abyan and Aykar rushed inside and disappeared, one into the upstairs of the house and the other into the lower level. Ardo, however, sat down at the dining table, laying her head on her outstretched arms.

“Upstairs, there are two bedrooms,” Abyan shouted as she ran down the steps from the upstairs.

“And there is another and a bathroom down in the basement,” said Aykar.

“Basement?”

“It’s basement, dummy!” Abyan jaded her brother.

Faayow approached and patted Ardo’s hair, “Honey, are you OK? You must be so tired, right?” she asked in Somali. Then she saw Cigaal standing in a corner, walked over to him, took him by the hand and seated him on the couch.

“You are exhausted, aren’t you? And probably hungry, hah?” Linda asked Ardo. She turned back and from a refrigerator took out some sandwiches and several bottles of soda. Turning to the oven she took out a warming pizza and placed everything on the table. She called Abyan and Aykar out of the basement.

“Abyan, please help me here, let them know that everybody can eat whatever is on the table. It’s all Halal. At least I know that much,” said Linda, expecting Abyan to be her interpreter. Abyan said nothing but grabbed a sandwich and bit into it.

Tom laughed. "I guess we didn't count on that coming, hah? Our interpreter abandoned us!"

"Smart girl. We should have had an interpreter today, but we will, tomorrow," Linda said.

Faayow said something in Somali to her husband, who got up, walked over to the bathroom and hesitated. She followed him and gently guided him to wash his hands.

Linda approached them and asked, "So, how much instruction does he follow?"

"She can't understand you, Linda. Our helper has abandoned her interpreting job, remember?" interrupted Tom, laughing.

"Let's just wait for her to finish eating. We might have better luck once she's full," Linda said.

Minutes later, Linda tried again, "Abyan, now that you are done, I need you to help me so I can say a few things to your family."

Abyan got up and stood next to Linda.

"Here tomorrow..." Linda trailed off to let Abyan follow her with Somali. But Abyan said nothing. Linda nudged her. "Abyan, you should repeat everything I say in English into Somali so that your family can understand."

"My father, my brother, and my sister all know English. But my father just does not speak!"

“I am sorry. I meant for your mother, Honey.”

“Ok,” Abyan followed.

“Listen, Tom is going to be back tomorrow with a Somali interpreter. Meanwhile, you should sleep well tonight. We can talk all about your new life in Minnesota tomorrow.”

Before leaving, Linda showed the children and their mother where food staples, dishes, and utensils were stored in the cupboards. Finally, she handed Abyan two business cards, stressing that they could call anytime if need arose. As Tom and Linda departed into the Minnesota night, Linda turned back to the children, “Abyan, please make sure this door is locked.”

About 7:30 AM, excited to greet their first American morning, Abyan and Ardo woke up, went to the window and were shocked to see white powder falling from the sky. With the exception of rain, they had never seen anything fall from the sky! They ran back and woke Aykar. In consultation, they decided that this was the snow they had seen in the movies, sending all three of them charging out into the cold. Diving their hands into the fluffy, soft particles, they each grabbed a handful and ran back inside. Realizing she did not have enough, Ardo grabbed a pot and ran back out. Abyan and Aykar watched and shivered as Ardo ran back and forth pouring several pots of snow into the sink. Soon her hands and fingers were burning from the cold snow. The strange sensation forced her to run with her dripping wet hands to the bedside of her mother.

Faayow leaped out of bed, took Ardo by her hands and instinctively led her to the stove, turning on the heat of the burner to warm her daughter's frozen fingers. While warming Ardo's hands, Faayow looked over to the window. Cigaal, wearing a sarong and a "Mohamed Ali" t-shirt, was watching the falling snow, smiling.

"Your father, your father, your father smiled for the first time in five years," Faayow said, almost yelling.

The children looked at each other as though she was delusional. Ardo drew her hands away from the stove and walked over to the couch to sit with Abyan and Aykar.

"Well, maybe it was my eyes. No, no, I saw him really smile. Yes, I am sure he did," Ardo heard her mother say to herself.

Outside, a revving car engine was heard as it pulled into the driveway. The children vied to see who it was. Two men--one black and one white--got out and walked to the front door. The children, in competition, rushed to let them in. Pushing Ardo aside, the other children each grabbed whatever part of the black man was closest to them and pulled him inside, possibly recognizing that he was a Somali.

"Hey, hey, how come no one is talking to me?" complained Tom!

"We got the perfect gift to send back to our friends in Kenya," said Ardo, sidestepping his question.

"What is it?"

Pulling the black man over to the window, Ardo pointed to the snow and said, “we brought some in to save it for our friends in Kenya. Can we send it, please, please, now? They will be so surprised.”

Tom let out a laugh and joining in the excitement asked, “Hey, Mukhtaar, can we export snow to Kenya?”

“One thing you probably didn’t count on about us is that we are capable of exporting Minnesota snow to East Africa” answered Mukhtaar.

“Well, now we know that one of Minnesota’s rare natural resources will not be wasted.”

“So, now we have settled that, let me tell them a bit about the danger of this natural resource and ‘new commodity,’” said Mukhtaar.

“Wait Mukhtaar, while you’re at it, should you tell them who you are?”

“What do you mean? I am a Somali!”

“Yes, but you might be from an archenemy clan.”

“There, there. Welcome to Somalis. We are very complicated humans, Tom. In Somalia I may have been from an enemy clan, but here I am simply ‘Uncle Mukhtaar.’ Just watch!”

“Well, I guess we better get to work then. Just remember that the father is mute and we have no idea why.”

“Sure,” said Mukhtaar. He walked into the middle of the room, and when he had everyone’s attention he began his introduction into the wonders and challenges of life in Minnesota. The snow and frigid temperatures that can bring on hyperthermia and frostbite sometimes causing people to lose fingers or toes or even die unless they are wearing warm, insulated clothing, caps, mittens, and scarves. He told them about the next steps: financial assistance, medical appointments, schools, transportation and other supportive services. He told them about grocery shopping and that both he and Tom were going to assist them.

“Kids, we are going to enroll you in school tomorrow, and I will take your mother to the financial assistance office.” He spoke with the children and answered their questions. “I am going to take your mother to get groceries and warm winter clothing for all of you.”

When he had finished, Faayow called him into the other room.

“Mukhtaar, listen, my husband needs immediate medical attention.”

“What kind of medical attention? Tell me a bit more.”

“I want you to help me find someone that deals with the mind.”

“But what is the matter with him?” asked a puzzled Mukhtaar.

“Well, most of his faculties are intact, but as you can see he does not talk. He has not said a word for five years,” said Faayow.

Cigaal walked by them, stood next to the window and looked out. Mukhtaar watched him while Faayow kept talking. "There are thousands of issues that I can't unpack for you at this minute. But this is an urgent matter for me and I am confiding in you. Most of the time, he does all the normal things. He sleeps, bathes, eats, but at times doesn't react to anything around him. You know what is possible around here. Find someone for me," she said.

"But you have not said what happened to him!" said Mukhtaar.

Faayow walked over to Cigaal and gently moved him away from the window which he was trying to open now. "Mukhtaar, please, try to find someone who can fix his mind. Can you do that for me?" she asked.

"Well... well, I am not sure, I am not... well, I will try... I will do my best but what..."

"Thanks. I don't want to keep you here," she said and walked out of the room.

"Yes, it's getting late," said Mukhtaar. He hugged each child, shook hands with Faayow and walked over to Cigaal who was staring out yet another window. When he did not turn around, Abyan jumped from the couch, and holding her father's hand said, "Aabo say bye to uncle Mukhtaar." Cigaal turned around but stared. Mukhtaar held his hand out and Cigaal took it in his.

"Bye, see you tomorrow Cigaal. Bye everybody!"

Seven weeks later, the children milled about eating breakfast, putting their clothes on and in minutes, had dressed for the weather, packed their book bags, and were out the door. Aykar and Abyan were first to get on their bus, and off to school. Their mother watched them from the window. A few minutes later a second school bus appeared. Faayow rushed out with Ardo in tow. When she made sure she was seated and the door closed, she walked back into the house.

Once inside it did not take her long to fall sleep on the couch in the living room. Soon Bayle's cries awakened her. She went to the refrigerator, took out a gallon jug of milk, looked at it and realizing that it was almost empty, consulted with the clock on wall. It was 8:30 AM, too early to call anyone. She thought and poured the remaining milk into a glass for Bayle.

At 11:30 AM Faayow picked up the phone and called Mukhtaar. No answer. She called Tom. No one answered. She called Linda, again no answer. She repeatedly called Mukhtaar and left messages. She cooked, fixed, mixed whatever source of food she could find to assuage Bayle. And because he was not fond of solid food, nothing comforted or satisfied him. Faayow paced back and forth in the living room, stealing glances at the clock on the wall watching time slowly move across the afternoon. At 3:00 PM, Bayle let out a piercing cry. Exhausted and anxiously waiting for the other children to arrive, she picked him up, kissed him, and sang to him while rocking him in her arms.

At 3:20 PM Ardo returned and at 3:30 when Abyan and Aykar came home from school, she handed Bayle, now sleeping, to Abyan. She put on her winter coat, scarf and gloves and headed out in the direction of the supermarket. Almost immediately she was hit by a wind gust that licked her face

with a shooting pain and bit her arms and legs with the same intensity. She trudged on.

Faayow entered the store, grabbed two gallons of milk, paid and left, carrying a jug in each hand. The blinding wind and snow had made the roads and sidewalk treacherous and she was soon struggling to keep upright. About halfway back, she lost her footing on an icy patch, landing hard on the pavement beneath her. She winced in pain but saved the milk jugs and pushed herself back up. She continued a few more blocks, stopped, put the milk down, took her gloves off and blew into her hands. She put the gloves back on, picked up the jugs of milk and soldiered on, pausing every now and then to set down the jugs and blow warm air on her hands. Finally, at her doorstep, she tried to reach for the door handle, but her feet slid out from under her, sending her to the pavement. One jug of milk burst open. As she slowly righted herself, she saw Ardo inching her way towards her and the others right behind her looking on, alarmed. She collected herself, grabbed the surviving gallon jug and entered the house in silent tears. Her body bruised, her arms and legs ached and her children crying, all she wanted now was to be back in the warm, familiar East Africa. Then she looked up and saw Cigaal pacing back and forth in the living room, and that brought her back to reality. Faayow stopped crying, and her children did the same. She did not say a thing but hugged them one by one, moved on to her husband, sat him down, took a seat next to him and kissed him on the cheek. She succeeded in calming him and he soon resumed his silent posture.

The next day while she was doing the laundry and cleaning the house the telephone rang. Faayow picked it up and heard Abyan's voice. "Hooyo, they want you in school right away!"

"Why?"

“Because Aykar had a fight.”

“Fought with you? You always figh---”

“Hooyo, Hooyo---”

“---since the—”

“Hooyoo. He fought with other kids in the school and beat two of them up. He fought twice today, Hooyo. And the principal wants to see you now.”

“Tell him I can’t come.”

“Hooyo, they are saying that you have to be here. It’s important.”

“Is my son OK?”

“Hooyo, he is fine but they want you to be here now, do you hear me?”

“Abyan, I got that but is my son OK?”

“Yes, Hooyo he is fine. How many times do I have to say it?”

“Tell them I have a toddler at home and a husband that can’t be left alone. I can’t come to

school," Faayow said. And with that, she hung up the phone.

Aykar arrived home at the end of the school day with a notification that he had been suspended for three days. Handing his mother the letter, he began telling her his side of the story but was interrupted by Mukhtaar and Tom's arrival. They had come to take the family grocery shopping but more importantly to let Faayow know that they had found an East-African psychologist to work with Cigaal.

Faayow was furious. Pacing throughout the room and talking fast and loud, she told them that she had known injustice all her life and that she was surprised that it had followed her here, if what the children were telling her were true. Now that her children were letting her know that they had been picked on and abused since the first day of school, she was livid. And today, Aykar, trying to defend his sister, had been attacked in the hallway.

Tom rushed to make a call to the principal of the school. Putting him on speaker phone the family heard the principal's version of what had taken place. They heard him state that Aykar was the aggressor, according to the students who witnessed the brawl. When Aykar pushed back and Mukhtaar asked for more clarification, it was quite obvious that the school staff had not bothered to ask Aykar for his side of the story. Faayow was outraged.

"I can't believe this; I can't believe it. They only listened to one side of the story. My children have been facing constant harassment since the day they arrived. They have been made fun of, laughed at and physically threatened, all in just the few short weeks we have lived here. I thought I was going to leave all that injustice behind in Somalia but I can see it is here too. Tell you what, I am going to leave your school, sir," said Faayow speaking into the phone. With that, she walked away

from the conversation and out of the room. The principal tried to speak to Tom but he, too, stood up and left.

To sound diplomatic Mukhtaar stepped in with, "Sir, please understand that we are carrying a lot of emotional baggage. We need you to be patient with us." He was trying to muffle the cultural divide without challenging the principal's insensitivity.

The principal in a passive tone said, "Well, she can bring the boy back in three days, but the girl can remain in school. She is wonderful. No behavioral issues and we love to have her."

"You love to have the girl but not the boy," snapped Mukhtaar.

"I didn't say that."

"Sure, it's implicit in your carefully crafted words, sir! Let me remind you that it isn't just about the three days' suspension. It is your inability to see the whole picture and protect all of your students!"

"I am not going there with you. I am not. But my decision has been made."

"If you make a decision in error or you are outright wrong, you can also unmake that decision," said Mukhtaar. "Have a nice evening, sir," he added and hung up

Turning to Faayow, Mukhtaar changed the subject and said in Somali, "We found a great Ethiopian psychologist, Dr. Abera. She is good and culturally competent. She may be able to help us. When we told her about Cigaal, she agreed to see both of you this week. If, after this initial meeting you want

to continue, she will schedule you for the next week. This is remarkable because she is booked but said she is going to add you on during the weekend and after hours. In fact, she can see him this Saturday, the day after tomorrow. I will take you both if that is OK with you.”

“Aw, Mukhtaar, that is great. Abyan can babysit Bayle while we are at the appointment.”

“Now, let’s get you grocery shopping,” said Tom.

Before they could begin the initial interview with Cigaal, Mukhtaar, and Faayow, Dr. Abera insisted they should call her by her first name, Rahel. She explained that she did not want a seasoned physician such as Cigaal to keep hearing her being called ‘Dr. Abera.’

“We have no idea what psychological minefield we may awaken in him. Besides, I don’t want to give the impression that just because I am a doctor I, in any way, can know or exactly understand what you experienced during the civil war in Somalia.” With that small but grand cordial gesture, she was able to put Faayow at ease and to begin to gain her trust.

Using Mukhtaar as her interpreter, Dr. Abera, Rahel now, began by asking Cigaal a set of simple questions, but when she did not get much out of him, turned her attention to Faayow. “I want to know about him but through you, Faayow. I’m going to ask you to speak not only for your husband but also for yourself. He is always going to be here with us here. I need to address him first but if he does not communicate, you are going to take on the task of telling me.

“Where do you want me to start?” asked Faayow.

“Let’s start from your earliest memories of the two of you,” responded Rahel.

Faayow was slightly hesitant but then she began, “When I first met Cigaal I was fourteen and he was twenty-one and in college. I was working for this well-placed general and Cigaal’s cousin. Cigaal convinced the general’s wife to let him teach me how to read and write in Somali, first at home, then he enrolled me in an adult school. Because of him, at the age of twenty-two, I graduated from high school with one of the highest scores in the nation. What I did not know then but know now is that he had no interest in me as a woman when he had begun investing time in me. You see, before we were ever husband and wife, he was this glamorous physician from one of the most prominent northern Somali clans, and I was a maid from one of the most ostracized minorities, a Bantu.

Faayow took a long pause, wondering if she had shared too much.

“I think I need to get home to my children now.”

“Yes, Faayow,” Rahel responded, looking at her watch. “We’ll continue next week.”

The therapeutic interviews continued for a few months as Faayow painted the picture of their lives together in Somalia, with interpretation help of Mukhtaar. She painted a picture of a man driven by conviction, be it the philosophical belief in nonviolence or equality and equity in social order. She attested

to the fact that he would get sick at the sight of a wounded animal, a cat, bird or dog, let alone a human being. She reiterated how he was able to see a bright student waiting to seize an opportunity where others saw a clan pedigree. In all, she stressed the fact that one should neither minimize nor overlook Somalia's tragic social caste of which they overcame.

But she also let them know that it did not always go well. She told them that when he had begun tutoring her, a group of pretty, female college students would sometimes show up in the middle of their sessions. Other times they would call, or simply ring the doorbell with a car waiting outside to pick him up. She was jealous of their glamour, their education and the time they would spend with him, encroaching on her limited opportunity. But most of all, she was disappointed when she thought he did not see that she had blossomed into a beautiful flower with dreams of going to college.

All that changed a year later when he came back from a two-year fellowship in the U.S.

“By the way, when I was in high school, like a parent, he would beam with pride whenever he heard that I was at the head of one of my classes. He would often bring something for me to read. And you couldn't quantify the value in that, getting your hands on what 'intellectuals' were reading in Somali. That was one of the reasons that I had also missed him so much when he was away.

With a slight giggle, Faayow then recounted when Cigaal surprisingly returned from the U.S.

She had just gone out for an early evening walk when a car stopped in front of her. The car opened, a man jumped out and ran toward her. It was Cigaal! She ran towards him and they

fell into each other's arms and embraced. He kissed her on both cheeks. Releasing her from his embrace, he wiped the tears of joy from her eyes. As she looked up she saw a woman emerge from the car, turn, and walk away. Cigaal called after her, but she did not turn around, and he did not bother to follow her.

"For the first time in my life, waves of electricity charged through my body when he hugged me and held me tight in the middle of that busy Mogadishu street. Mind you we weren't religiously that conservative then, but still it was taboo for the opposite sex to do what we did in public. Apparently, I did not care and neither did he. I got into his car and after aimlessly driving around for a while, I asked him to take me home. As I was getting out of the car, he held my hand and squeezed it so tight that I felt it. It wasn't a kiss and it wasn't a word, yet that was the moment I knew we had crossed the little Bantu girl's boundary. Two days later we planned our first secret rendezvous together. There you have it; I was born in bondage yet unbound by it."

"Of course it did not end there. This Bantu girl could not have a doctor from a mainstream Somali clan and get away with it that easy. With the exception of his cousin and wife, the same family that I was working for, his parents and many of his relatives were extremely disappointed. They tried their best to sabotage our union. In the end a few came around but not his father nor mother."

"Thank you, Faayow, for sharing these details of your relationship with Cigaal. Let's schedule our next meeting," said Dr. Abera.

Months of follow-ups later, Dr. Abera, looking at a computer screen, and then at Mukhtaar and Faayow, said, “Where were we exactly? Let me see. You were telling us that it was about noon one day in Mogadishu the last time you heard your husband talk. Can you tell me about that day?”

Faayow looked up, fidgeted with her skirt and said, “It has been five years and a few months since I last heard his voice.”

“Go on. What happened, Faayow?”

“It was about noon, Mogadishu time, when Gacal, our well-to-do neighbor rang the gate bell with some urgency,” she began haltingly, and paused. “Seeing him through a hole in the gate, Cigaal rushed to open it.

“Gacal said, ‘Listen, I don’t have much time. We tried to leave four days ago when we learned that my twelve-year-old nephew had gone missing. We looked and called everyone we knew but nobody had seen or heard from him. Two days ago, I sent my wife and children to Kenya but stayed behind in the hope that I was going to find him. I found him all right. But only his body. I no longer have a reason to stay here. It’s too dangerous, particularly when a person is suspected of being wealthy. So please take this.’ He held up a small burlap bag and went on to say, ‘If I take this money with me, and someone finds out, for sure I am not going to survive. You are doing me a favor by taking it from me.’

“When he said that, my husband took a step, and backed away. I can still see that picture in slow motion. Gacal trying to hand over a small burlap sack to Cigaal. Cigaal taking three or

four steps back and raising his hands as though he were held at gunpoint. Gacal matching each step with a forward one. Suddenly heard a horrible, deafening whoosh. In the midst of falling debris, Gacal was now lying on the ground in a pool of blood, both legs severed at the knees. Cigaal rushed over, tore his own shirt off and tried to wrap and tie Cigaal's legs. Clearly realizing that he could not help, he took Gacal into his arms and cried."

As she painfully recalls the horror of that moment, Faayow was almost breathless.

"Here was my husband hopelessly trying to apply what he knew best but to no avail. He couldn't do anything except to take Gacal into his arms, lift him and run to the car. He ordered me to drive while he cuddled him in his arms. Gacal died in his arms on our way to the hospital. The last words I heard him say were, 'What happened to my country? What happened to my country? What happened to my country?' He repeated that over and over, robotically."

By now the tears were streaming down Faayow's cheeks.

Dr. Abera, shaken by this heart wrenching account, quietly said, "I think we should stop here. Do you want a few minutes before you leave?"

"No, no, I am fine. I want to tell this story. I need to tell this story." Faayow insisted, grabbing a handful of Kleenex and dabbing her eyes and cheeks.

"That was the last time I heard my husband's voice, but I don't remember his exact words." The clock on the wall ticked, and on, and on. It seemed as though Faayow was unable to go

on when she added, "He hasn't spoken a word since. And that is why I must tell his story. I have to tell it."

Faayow stood up to leave, taking a seemingly unaffected Cigaal by the hand.

"So, Faayaw, did your husband have any hobbies?" began Dr. Abera at the start of their next session. She stopped and thought a second before asking "But before we get to that, has your husband shown any renewed interest or awareness at home or around family?"

"Thank God, yes. Day after day, he is improving. He is taking his medication on time, eating, and changing his clothing without having to be reminded. Well, not always but I would say over eighty percent of the time."

"So, let us go back to that last question, about his hobby," said Dr. Abera.

"To answer your question, most Somali men are either soccer fans or pretend to be players. Wait a minute. Yes, yes, he loved poetry and music. He loved music."

"What kind?"

"He loved Somali music of the sixties, seventies and eighties."

"Why don't you go home, put one of his favorite tapes on

tonight and let me know how he reacts?"

Faayow looked at her husband and asked "Would you like to hear some music, Cigaal? Khadra Dahir, Magool, Mohamed Saleebaan, Faysal Cumar Mushtayk? Who, honey? Oh, my God, why haven't I thought of that?"

Suddenly, she jumped up to leave. Cigaal followed.

"Wait Faayow," Dr. Abera called after her. "How long has it been since you yourself last listened to a piece of Somali music?"

Faayow stopped, turned around and held her husband's hand. "It was that same day," she said.

"Tell me a bit more," said Dr. Abera.

Fayoow helped Cigaal back to his chair and she sat again, taking a few seconds before she once again shared her story.

"Cigaal was soaked in Gacal's blood when we got back to the house. The music was playing on a tape player. My husband grabbed it and with full force, smashed it against the wall, shattering it to pieces. I have not played any music in our home since."

"What did Cigaal say at that moment?" asked Dr. Abera.

"Nothing, not a word. He stood there like a statue until I took his hand and led him away. Two days later we packed up and left for Kenya."

“So, you too have been avoiding music but holding your husband’s hand ever since?” asked Rahel.

“Very much,” said Faayow.

“Do me a favor Faayow, when you get home put on a tape of one his most favorite songs. I’d like you both to sit together, and listen,” suggested Dr. Abera.

“Thanks, Rahel. I am going to do just that,” said Faayow. She stood up, held her husband’s hand and they walked out.

“Let me know what happens, Faayow,” shouted Dr. Abera after her.

In the apartment, Faayow opened one suitcase after another; took out a handful of cassettes; chose one and rushed to grab a tape player out of another suitcase. Carrying them and the tape player, she took her husband by the hand and went into the living room. She sat him down on the couch, turned the tape player on and went into the kitchen to quietly watch his reaction. As soon as the tune greeted the air, Cigaal straightened his now arched posture, and slightly tilted his head up. He listened:

Ma ogtahay in badan baan

Kaa aamuunaayoon

Afka kaala baqayee

Are you aware that I have been unable

To approach you with words

So fearful to speak with you?

During the refrain, he looked around, stood up and looked about as though in search of something or someone. The next verse hit the air.

Ma ogtahay indhaha iyo

Uurku ba daraadaa

In ay kuu ilmayaan

Kalcayl la ooyaan?

Are you aware of my eyes

As well as of my heart

Are all weeping for you

With so much love?

He began to hum along with it. He took a step toward the music, then another, and another. When he reached the tape player, he touched it as though to authenticate it.

From the kitchen, Faayow slowly walked over until she was close enough to reach Cigaal. She put her hand on his shoulder, turning him around to look at her. She put her hands around his waist and held on to him. Gently, she rested her cheek on his shoulder, tears rolling down her cheeks.

In a low but clearly audible voice, Cigaal began to sing along, dancing slowly with Khadra Dahir's majestic joyous moan of:

Ma ogtahay asaag iyo

Inaan aynigaagaba

Awadaa u diidoo

Kaa eegto dunida ba.

Do you know that all my equals

And your peers, too

That of whom I rebuffed

And that of whom I rejected

Because of my love for you?

It was the same love lyrics she had written on a piece of paper for him on their first date.