

THE BOOK OF NASEEB

Khaled Nurul Hakim was born in Birmingham and has a background in film and poetry, publishing sparingly in the 1990s. He was visiting tutor in MA Screenwriting at the London College of Printing till 2004. *The Book of Naseeb* originally began as a 2005 screenplay for a low-budget feature film to be called *Barzakb*. Scheduled to be shot in Uzbekistan, the project was aborted when civil unrest broke out. Khaled took a decade-long break from writing to pursue a spiritual path, becoming a Sufi student and Sufi musician. He returned to rework the text as 'a degraded epic' while also looking after a growing family, a task that would take more than seven years.

ALSO BY KHALED NURUL HAKIM

POETRY

The Lost Poems (forthcoming, 2020)

Letters from the Takeaway (Shearsman, 2019)

The Book of Naseeb

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Penned in the Margins

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ISLAMIC TERMS AND CONCEPTS

ANGELS

Jibreel	(also the <i>Ruh</i>) Archangel Gabriel, responsible for imparting messages from Allah;
Mikail	Archangel Michael, responsible for earthly phenomena and sustenance;
Israfil	Raphael, who blows the 'soor' or trumpet at end of the world;
Azrail	Angel of Death
Noble Scribes	(also called Receivers) <i>Arab. Kiraman Kaatibeen</i> , the recording angels of left and right who arrive at a person's age of responsibility, traditionally from eight years on
Protectors	(also called Followers) the protecting angels of front and back. Traditionally there is a changing of the watch at <i>Asr</i> (mid-afternoon) and <i>Fajr</i> (dawn)
Ruh	<i>Arab. lit.</i> 'Spirit', an epithet for Archangel Jibreel

HEAVENS

- Mi'raj *Arab.* ascension (esp. Prophet's journey through the seven heavens)
- Preserved Tablet *Arab.* 'al Lawh al Mahfuz', a metaphorical locus of the incorruptible Quran, created before time; it also holds the written destiny of every scintilla of the universe
- Buraq *Arab.* lit. 'lightning', fabled steed that transported the Prophet in his Night Journey
- Ayah *pl. ayat*, a Quranic verse; a sign, proof; a miracle. The Quran itself is counted as the greatest miracle, sign, and proof.
- Barzakh *Arab. Pers.* 'divide, barrier'. A place between Heaven and Earth where deceased souls await the final Judgement Day, where they may experience their own heaven or hell.

TIME

Salah	<i>Arab. pl. salat</i> , formal invocatory prayer at set times, <i>namaz</i> in Persian and Urdu
Magrib	<i>Arab.</i> lit. 'west', prayer at sunset. The Islamic day runs strictly from sunset to sunset
Esha	<i>Arab.</i> 'night', prayer at this time
Fajr	<i>Arab.</i> 'dawn', prayer at this time; time the angels change their watch (<i>Fajr khadib</i> : 'false dawn')
Zuhr	'midday', prayer at this time; on Friday this becomes congregational 'Jummah' prayer
Asr	<i>Arab.</i> 'mid-afternoon', prayer at this time; time the angels change their watch
Qiyam	<i>Arab.</i> lit. 'standing', a superogatory night prayer halfway between Esha and Fajr

Ramadan, Ramzaan *Arab.* ninth month in the Islamic calendar, month in which the Quran was first revealed, month of fasting

I'tikaf *Arab.* 'devoting', practice of spiritual retreat in mosque during last days of Ramadan

Laylatal Qadr *Arab.* variously translated as 'Night of Power', 'Night of Majesty', 'Night of Destiny or Decrees', 'Night of Measures'. In this night the year's decrees for all souls descends together with angels, departed souls, and gates of Hell.

Suhoor *Arab.* prescribed meal before dawn during Ramadan

Taraweeh *Arab.* lit. 'refreshment', superogatory Ramadan night prayers after Esha, reciting a *juz* (group of Quran chapters)

A full glossary appears on page 319.

Asterisked speech in italics denotes that it is dialect; unasterisked speech in the same dialogue denotes reversion to English.

to the Author of all

Part One

*The Book
of Naseeb*

1 | *The Mi'raj of Angels*

In which the Archangel Jibreel gathers the Recording Angels and Protecting Angels and instructs them of their charge; and they mark the fate of the soul in the Preserved Tablet; and make the *mi'raj* to his world.

§

Read! In the name of your Lord, who created, created from a clot, and assigned each soul Receivers, to record in truth; and from these no thought is hidden, no scornful word unheard, and from whose Pens naught shall go unwrit.

And at the fiat of Jibreel, we gathered in the lowest sphere within the compass of a grain. And a thousand angels brought down the Preserved Tablet wherein all is decreed.

Read! said the Ruh, and stretched thousandfold Wings bounding the geometry of our world around a drop of sea.

And I saw archangel Israfil flicker into a trumpet-blowing messenger in gorgeous flowing green and turban, and his lips poised to blow for Judgement Day. And heavyclouded Mikael with his angel hosts who would drive the wind and rain and sea before them.

Read! That your Lord who knows the fall of a sparrow's egg is content to hear the Accounts from the Recorders of the Right and Left Hand; and these, from the tangle of human motives, assign each deed to good and bad. And given to you, Roquib, precedence over Atid of the Left Hand, that you may allot tenfold or seven hundredfold merits to a completed good deed. And Allah is Merciful, All-Knowing.

How many Angels assemble at the blast? Protectors and Scribes for every soul ever born.

Some mystics imagine our world so well that in their minds it assumes a shape. But this shape has no top or bottom, it is not coloured, it has no weight. Truly our substance is infinitely stiff, infinitely pliant. We vibrate as one with no delay and no wave motion. Nevertheless the blast of Israfil's horn disturbs a boat on a calm lake.

*And given each soul two Followers, front and rear, to ward off evil. And these are with him from the womb—*And the Protectors Hamza and Alif, the Protectors emerge from the waves.

An Angel is a fine and wonderful thing, almost amphibian between being and not being; as elastic deformation, or variation of pressure or electrical or magnetic intensity, or temperature. The water does not move forward, only the shape of the wave. And the boat oscillates up and down.

And we gazed on the Preserved Tablet.

There in a lambent lake of calligraphy the last of his words shine in the skinless surface—the filamental floaters of a life trembling, trembling in the Eye of the Creator.

Ah, what can describe the Preserved Tablet wherein the Book is writ?

Some see a hundred stark woods against a grey sky, each instant shuttling aspen, ash, and elms; with only a rumble of autumn wind against the flash of branches. Some see ten thousand bells of jellyfish, pulsing with luciferin blue and pink, and look through streams of tendrils, and plankton and arthropods twitching in the solid sea.

These unformed signs, the unformed signs before *alif* was formed.

The Archangel dips a Wing in the skinless surface of the Book.

And we descry the creature's face in the lake. There in his eyes it is we who are holding him down, our shadows wobbling in skeins of light, as he drowns in a scumstained bath. The water yammering in his ears. Then our shapes explode in shards. And his life flashes before him...

And we thought: *If he is dying, who is this old man and boy?
Rifle and ammunition slung from shoulder and hips, scraping*

down the mountain track, a box wrapped in jute strapped to the back of the old farmer. And a scrawny pale horse or donkey weighed down with a crate. Lines drawn in dust in the old man's face, who is not as old as he looks, and the stripping the same...

... the boy against the pack animal, salwar kameezes flapping as knees buckle on the ruts. The man's eyes fixed on the path, passing words with his son as they clamber down. The track flushing down into a white road bounded by ridges.

(And each Night of Decree, when the year is revealed for the soul, we watch this vision of his end.)

We dive into the Book of Naseeb.

We dive into a lake of kelp. As far as we look the canopy sways with the surge, full of gaps and full of lights. Pregnant with all past and future. Blue rockfish and kelp blades flash blank surfaces. Bristleworm, scud and eelgrass deform into signs...

Read!

... When their mother came in, Arif gets up and turns to the wall.

... A dog smeared in excrement and blood runs down the street on three legs, looking back at him, beseeching.

... The creature goes to stay with his mother after youth detention. Every memory of her, she's looking over her shoulder while

he hurries after.

... They wheel around and smash an umbrella in his face. He runs home crying and cupping the blood in his hands. His father took him to the hospital and says, You want injection? The nurse has to stitch up the boy's face without anaesthetic.

... The boy sprang up and into the sack and bounded from the others; but the headmaster stopped the race, for his sack has a hole.

His life flits by as sea cucumber and bat star...

And here, his first page!—a boy of ten in oversized Rambo T-shirt playing with other hazel-eyed children outside the white-walled house. On the flat roof the big girls play badminton, bunches of iron supports sprouting around them. And he's trying to get the kids in kurtas to play dusty football between gates that drape buntings and banners as if expecting the next wedding party.

Abba and Chacha, moustached and paunched in their kurtas, and his brother Arif get into the minivan with darkened windows.

He runs crying Baba! Chacha!, hanging on the door handle as it edges out. His father barking rebuke; Chacha, ever indulgent, lets him in.

And in the minivan they feed him pistachios, Arif glowering on the back seat even then—(how he misses his bullying!).

—**Eat, boy. Why don't you eat? Bhaiya, why is he so thin? It's not right for a Londoni.*

—**I beat them—do they eat? It's their mother's fault.*

(Where is his mother? She should be there, a soft buffer smelling of eau de toilette and sunscreen in her white headscarf and scorched skin. If she was there, snug between...)

Cigarette smoke gusting round and out the windows; he and Arif slyly kick each other.

Driving across arid plains. Everything the colour of lime. Then the fields of poppy. Mujahadeen stand in the orange heads, nicking poppy bulbs with a knife and screwing up their faces. (Somewhere the farmer and son stumble down the mountain track with the skinny pale horse or donkey.)

There in the border bazaar—tape recorders blaring distorted Quran, greasy Kalashnikovs, ammunition rounds, mortars on the stalls. Abba and Chacha cross-legged with jummah-going shop owners on the wooden stoops. And a bearded mullah leans forward, sober waistcoat criss-crossed with ammunition belts, to pinch his cheek (Naseeb, nai?), and a swell of pride tingles his ears.

They talk more and Chacha takes out a bundle of notes and puts it on the stoop.

And then he and Arif hold a Kalashnikov, and Abba fires in the air.

And now here, sneaking a glimpse in the backyard with Arif—the menfolk at some alchemy with a narrow trough of treacle giving off fumes, the blazing firewood in the afternoon not warmer than the grateful lump of love he feels, this privileged men’s world of Abba and Chacha and Arif..

Is this how he will remember dying?

Where, then, is Azrael, Archangel of Death? In the towering trunks of kelp stipes, the shadow of a grey whale so enormous it goes unseen.

And we hear the blast of Israfil’s horn smashing through the waters, and we arrow back to the surface.

And at the fiat of the *Ruh* Jibreel, we gathered in the lowest sphere within the compass of a grain.

And received the Book and the boy.

Henceforth are you confined to the slave, paired to record the Truth, which lies in the other’s hidden region. And created in symmetries, that you may succeed each other in the watches of the day, and the watches of the night. And your zaat as Angel-shaped threads from this world to the world of creatures. And your Lord is Merciful, Kind.

And Mikael of the wind and rain and sea and earth, and his angel hosts, made ready to translate to the realm of creatures. And he stretched thousandfold Wings.

Ten billion Angels feel the fluctuations. And at this instant we become Followers and Scribes for every soul ever born.

And with them the Noble Atid and I made ready to translate to the place of the creature. And the Relieving Angels keep a heartshaped lake till the appointed time.

Khoda hafiz, we say to each other, What you observe, we observe. As you are there, we are there.

An exploding horizon of Wings.

We cascade down shearing radiance, our faces burnt from the limitless sun, to receive a boy of ten in Rambo T-shirt, with the hazel-eyed children outside the white-walled house, and together dance with him, together dance with him to death.

2 | *The Account of the Angel of the Right Hand*

In which Your creature seeks his misfortune with the help of Angels and men; and is confounded by a drop of Mercy from a woman; and dreams of doing good; and finds his misfortune removed.

§

(Asr: 1605 GMT)

Da man runs out of his flat wiv da left luggige ticket.

An his Protectors front and back. Arownd dere transparence dey assume da semblans of cortiers from Samarkand. And dese have folowed him from da womb.

And I say to them:

Assalaamu alaykum Hamza, assalaamu alaykum Alif, how gos da servant?

Greetings, O Noble Scribes, you tell us, sez Hamza. We just wipe his bum.

Yr servant runs out of da flat wiv da left luggige ticket. Its mundane paper shining wiv *baraka*, to be exchangd for a black polythen parcel; dats gonna tumble out his Golden Fleece, gilding

his face wif bliss, O shining faces of da blessed! *I pray You Lord,*
his hert beats, *Save this sad creture, for I am f____d. May I be truly*
thankful. Amen.

Da creature floors da clapping motor. Da whole way vex
by da yowling yute, da yowling babby in th back o da car, and a
fear th ticket wud fly out of his pocket.

—Todays da day, bway! Redistrbute som welth. Make em
pay! Trust me. Yu gonna ride shotgun for me? You da Man! I need
yu.

But da babby is bawling snot in his babychair.

—Hey, Jonah! Lern som history, mistah. You payin
attension? We won da war for dem goore. **Us Pathans, bwoy.*
Understand? Hanh. So now we're helping arselves. Ey, bill up for me,
geeza... for fffaaa... Hey, Jonah...!

But da babby is bawling snot.

And under his breth, *Shut da fff-flip up, man.*

(Careful of his hart, Naseeb. Th child doz not know riht and
rong. His Protecting Angels strong.)

—Yu shud a met my Legal. He'da educated ya. Wots one
crime when yu got British come n screw evryone over? But you
knock over one old boy, an da hole machinery comes down on ya!

But da pickney yowls for his bottel.

I rite his words, *I get you da juce, I get you da juce,* as one

good deed. And my noble Atid will sternly smile an say, *Let him turn the car rownd. I'll giv him a thozand merits.*

And da car swerving as da servant gropes for a baby botle.

—Here, cane it. Only Jonah, yu gotta fix up, look da part, get me? I cant do this without yu. Blatant. Yore my sideman. Anyone com near me, yore da mouth.

And da Protectors wrap dere powers around da car to stop it swerving. And perhaps, perhaps dere was an atoms waitht of kindnes for da child. And praps I shud record it as ten good deeds.

Da road to Heethrow is alwayz roosting.

Yor creture floors da clapping motor.

Aw, we are breezin, cry Hamza an Alif, striking fihing pozes on da hood n roof, thoh assuming da semblans of cortiers from Samarkand—thir green tunic and turban tails ripping: *Wet dat motor, bossman!* And da child's Protectors cry, *Maashallah,* and a liht blazed whirling from his weels.

And if you cud see a Caravan of Protectors poized on bonnets an hoods in da jam from Northolt!—thir wite robes or black tunics ripping, or as elastic deformasion, or electrical or magnetic intensity...

And in de airport da cretur clings like begfrend to da child. In his hand da left luggig tiket. Its mundane paper shining

wif *baraka*.

An he mutters to himself not to talk, he mutters himself not to talk. Da luggige attendant finks hes got a mental condicion. Da ticket soked wiv swet.

And despar filld his univers as de attendant disapeared in da back. Da Feds about to absail out da sky and bang him up in a meat wagon.

Da pickney griping.

And do you see da African cleener dragging her polythen bag? Yea, shes bin lost here forever. Dere's djinn in every airport!

Dat djinn, shes gonna mess wiv his head, sez Alif.

And her litter picker clips da cretures foot till hes vex.

Sorry, my dear, shes mumbling.

An his patting da child bare vexed. An he finks he hears her mumble, *Are you all waiting with dis gentleman?*

The attendant com back wiv a babby's green holdall. And Noble Atid waches da slaves neck. Surely dey see his neck vein pulse! And Noble Atid wispers: *Dey know, dey know wat yu do. Yore blatant.*

But Naseeb lifts the exquisit heft.

And da pickney Jonah griping.

Da Followers throw dere sheeld arond. But dat creaturs

lost his hart, his feet cant goo strait. And he sits with Jonah, whoz soaked in s__t. An he cant think straiht. And he feels in da green bag. Feels for a nappy. Feels for a polathene bag packt in Peshawar.

And his Protectors assume da semblans of two airport Feds. To mess wiv his hed. Two airport Feds com from the other side o th concorse. And Yor slave hears handsets jammed wiv noiz, feels them standing dere wif agate eyes.

An his hand grips da polathene in da bag.

And the babby stares at dem. Soaked in s__t.

And Five-O smiling back. Da pickney's Protectors, immezurably strong, say: *Pooh! I think the babys trying to tell you something.*

An next man Hamza raizes his MP5 and farts: *Well put that on th record!*

Astaughfirullah, and Noble Atid rasps on dere walkie-talkie: *Back to yr stacions, gentelmen.*

And dey melt back.

Dat creturs rooted. Till Jonah starts howling. And he legs it to the exit—da pickney howling, Five-O about to absail out da sky, his body so hype it wud a shattered if somone askt direcsions.

And Noble Atid wispering: *They know wat you do, they know wat you do.*

Da carpark streches as far as da rack and wind of Mikail

spanning horizons with his wings. And still no one stops da slave.

When he reches da car Yor servant triz to clean da scribeless child. Yea, an innocent stepdad wiv his Pampers. But hes shat up to his neck. Screaming Old Bill down. An da servant trying to wipe him wid da babygrow and hose him with a bottle a water.

Jesus, he weeps, Plese, Jesus.

Yea Yor creture stuffs da soiled garms in a carryer bag. And unzips da baby holdall. (Packt in Peshawar two weeks ago. Da Companion of da Left Hand recorded it). Now he tekes out a blak polathene parcel and sticks it in da cronic nappy bag n ties it up.

Da future like a garden o grassy eaze & largess, an companionable houris wif sherbet—he can tuch it!

Da slave drives dazed. Somewere up da motorway he miht crash, an da pickney inherit a kilo of smack.

Da Followers throw dere shield around da car. As if they cud deflect his corse an atom's bredth.

As if they cud protect him when da car lost power. When da car lost power arond da island he almost passes out.

Da Protectors for da child, immezurably strong, asume da semblans of da Sahaba: *O Followers! Man yor frail bark! Catch the dowlful wind and eaze him to his reward.*

Da Followers for Naseeb cry battle criez, flash agate eyes,

Ya Seen! Haul to, Protectors! Keep this bag o nails straiht, Alif! Ya Seen! Ya Seen!

The Protectors for da scrybeless child, thir wite robes ripping, flash dark: *Yallah, habibin, lets speed him to his doom! Allahu Akbar!*

Dey chant da battle criz o da Sahaba, *Ta Ha! Ta Ha!* And thir Powers crackle.

Da pickney Jonah slept.

Dat creatur drove round twice arond da block befor he parks.

And walking up da starewell, babby in one arm, two bags in the other, Yur slave he trembles.

Yea, deres more dred letters on da mat. And Alif shoots out a protectif shield: *Long as he doznt open them his safe.*

An he checks Alesha's shift.

Put da pickney in bed.

Put a green bag on da kichen table.

Owner of da World.

(Maghrib: 1759 GMT)

Da slave cuts da smack.

But da Noble Scribe must stay his entry, for dis creatur may yet repent or pray.

Blazing a spliff as he weiys again. Digital scales. Starch.
Polathene bags. Razor blade.

And da scribeless babby waching in th doorway, gets
pushd away to a video. But da babby wants to wach.

Thru his eyes.

Dat slave hes teasing into score bags.

—End of th day ya cyaant beat da painkillin propertys of
ma erb, mon. What you say? Hanh? They make a natural plant
illegal innit... They want ya to buy billions of asprins an s__t. But
yu get natural herb yeh—like s__tlodes a medical benefits—

And one of his fones is warbling.

—Jonah, get that for us.

An he chups his teeth an skins up and checks da caller.
Coz he never ansers.

And da babby maks a dash for da bags. And Yor creture
scolds him in Pashtu:

—**Ey ey ey—not till you do som work arond th house!*

And Jonah yowling. Dat slave he hurriz to seal da bags.
And hes cooing baby Urdu wif a blade a powder:

—**Nice—tasty tasty... Baby num num. Why dont you eat?
Peple died so you coud have a taste.*

An da slave makes th call to Ali.

—Nice num num... Ali Baba! Salaamaykum! Heh heh

heh. Good, *chacha*. Got something for ya... Yeh man, yeh man—
Im a big boy now. Ain it... I cant, boss. I cant just yet. Paciense,
chacha. So how soon we sort this? Oh, com man—deyr gonna
loze this! I need it upfront—dis aint smalltime s__t... **Paciense,*
chacha, paciense. I'll let you kno. Yeah, you let me know, I got peple
on hold... I gotta sort few ting. Few ting ain it... Heheheh, yeh-
man. You an me *chacha*! I tole you wed make a team!

Truly, blazing his weed not warmer dan this love he feels,
of Chacha an him.

Dat creatur clears da kichen.

Doz he not see? Jonah bilding his own works—toy cash
register, Play-Doh, packets a Hula Hoops, plastic nife: cutting a
pece of playdo an puting it into a packet, shuffling Hula Hoops
into another, wayhing it on da scale...

The agate eyes of da Noble Scribe they see.

Dere was a text in dred capitals:

BAILIFFS due to remove your GOODS. Call NEWKEY on
01604 100341 to stop this. Quote ref 1928150. Do not text.

Just da capitals got his body flooding angwish agen.

But what dett is this? Hes almost pissed enuf to call them.

And he goos in the bedroom to pick out a prosthetic shell.
One of his collection of prosthetic legs for his plans to help da
limmless. To help da limmless in Peshawar n Kabul.

And he packs da score bags in a leg.

Dat creture hears her key—Aleshas key in th door—and jumps to stick a spoon a mush in da child. And her Protector’s Wings dey riffle in da hall. Her Protectors wrap dere wings round Leesha’s bump as she bends down to pick up letters.

And Alif and Hamza shear across her Followers, an put dere faces in Leesha’s bump. And say to da Angel of da Womb, *Ya Rabbi, a drop of seed? Ya Rabbi, a clot? Ya Rabbi, a morsel of flesh?* And as far as dey look da canopy sways, and protectors twitching in da solid sea. Dat pulses now wif *baraka*.

And our creture doznt know about her woom.

She smells him penguin up da flat, and throws down unregenerat letters, and looks at da mess.

And Yor creture:

—I tryd to get him to vacuum but he wudnt have it.

—For Godsake, Naseeb. You havnt changd him.

Dat servant drops th demands on th table. (His debt collections gather in a shoebox. Dose at da bottom she must never see).

And as she screws, de Followers mimic to de babby: *We shud talk, this isnt going anywere, hav yu got a job, blah blah...*

Yor creatur teks a zoot from his ear:

—**Eat, eat, boy. Take a long drag. Why dont you eat?*

Say, wat does Jonah want in da kichen?

—Thats alriht, Jonah. You'll haf to make do with me. Uncle Naseeb has got more important things. Never mind yore going to get nappy rash. What do you want, Jonah? You cant have that! Yes yes, Im th horrible one. I keep th flat going. I keep th car on th rode. I arrange the daycare while he flys off somwere. Probbly to visit his child bride.

And as shes screwing at him Yor creature mimics to da babby:

—We shud talk, this isnt going anywhere, have you got a job, blah blah...

And she swept up her child to change him, change him in da bedroom.

—She can com over here if she likes. Do som laundry. Id like a holiday... Wud you lik to stay with him wile I vizit his other wives? You cudnt call him Dad thoh. Coz he doznt relly want to be with us. Some men, they just need a base. Somone stupid they can tap when they like.

—Yes dear. Thats riht.

She kisses her babby fiercely as he whinges.

—Im sorry, Jonah. You dezerve better. An yuve seen too much. Mummy gets too... She doznt give you enuf priority.

And sweeping in an out of rooms to hang out cloze and

put another load in. And da scribeless child gone back to his dealers game: cutting his stash o Mini Cheddars wiv Playdo an weyhing da packets on his scale.

(And Noble Atid: *By no means can he be distracted!*)

And Yor creture feels her:

Wots da beeyatch screwing at now?

And da slave finds her wif da green baby bag.

—I bowht it for Jonah.

Ah, she feels him—taking it from her hands and into da bedroom. Were he scwirrels it behind da wardrob.

Ah, she feels him. Do ye see her scoping da kichen? And th scales. Yea, and in da swing bin: a ball o black plastic taped tihte. A razor blade.

Dat servant feels her stomak fall sume place. (Da Followers for da Mother fan balm into her nose.) Ach! She hears dat slave cum back. But she didnt speak. For if she asked him he wud lie. (Wud he not lie?) And it wud come out in da spitting confrontasion. And cud she throw him out agen?

And da Mother went in da bedroom. And Yor creture felt her. An da child came into th living room wiv his scales.

And he herd her: *I dont want this!*

Dat mutha come in with artificial limms in ech hand, in

ech hand a limb dat she threw at him!

Yor creturs hart contracts. And Alif & Hamza block wiv *silat* moves—as if they cud deflect an atom!

—I dont want this s__t arond Jonah!

Dat slave cud smack her up da head.

The Scribes of da Left Hands note thir words as they screw at ech other.

Do you see Naseeb baling on her now? And smuggling out his collecsion o limbs? Smuggling his legs & hands into her carboot, to salvige som tokens of his dreame. Look at him chasing his dreame... Can I rite som attribute of goodnes clings to these gifts to da poor an orphaned? And dat, somewere, his intension is pure?

(Esha: 1945 GMT)

Da creture thowt about driving Leeshas whip to Fat Tone's, but hes bare shook about da kilo in Leeshas boot. And he calls his spar Zak, he called his spar to pick him up.

And he brings out da last leg to jam into her boot.

By the silver Audi dat parks at Leeshas. And da sodium street lite. And dat servant Zak, his Angels hugging da shaved lines in his hed.

And sez Naseeb:

—I need you with me, geez.

—Deres baggamans screwin you done a runner Naz.

—Wot you chattin? Dat s__t is all rinsed. What they sayin?

—Gonna murkalise you bruv.

Yor creture stares a bit. (*Jam, brah, we got your back, sez Hamza*). Then he fishes in da boot and beckons da servant Zak.

—Yeah? You wanna see my protector? Deyr gonna think twice befor they mess wiv dis s__t.

—Yor what?

Yor creture scoping arond.

—Dis ting is mint! Old scool, bway, old scool.

—Nah man.

—Com man, feel it. Ting is antiq.

—Thats bait blud. You cant be flashing dat araond.

—Wot you on about? I aint gonna use it. Ting is just for ni-iceness.

And Naseeb threw his ting from da boot and da Followers for Zak throw a sheeld around him, an dat cretur halfspins around. An a prosthetic hand hit him over his Calvins and smacks to da ground.

—Rah!

And his dumb spar kicks away da hand, and Yor creature

goz:

—Oi! Go eazy with ma gat!

And Yor creture examins da hand for scratches & Zach looks in da boot at da rest o th haul.

—Dat is som sick mash cuz.

For bridges got burnt running to Pakistan. And word went out and dere were twelve yer old wannabees redy to jack Yor creatur. He needs to speak to one of da faces. Coz its a mistake. He never ripped em off. He'll pay it back.

And Yor slave didnt wanna leve his legs, he didn wanna go Zaks ride and leve a kilo in her boot.

Jam, brah, we got yor back, sez Alif.

And dey extend thir Wings round Leeshas car.

And Noble Atid sez, *As tho ye change whats coming by a hairs bredth.*

And Hamza sez, *Why, wots coming?*

And if you cud see Protectors poized on bonnets n hoods speeding to Stonbrigge Park!—thir wite robes or black tunics ripping, or as elastic deformation, or electrical or magnetic intensity...

And dat slave was finking bout his dreame in Leeshas boot da hole ride.

(Taraweeh: 2105 GMT)

And outside Fat Tones street his bruckup Escort was on da street.

Dey sat in the Escort getting licky on Fat Tones draw.

An da Protecting Angels dissipate in da penging air. Sumewere on da hood deys busting *silat* moves n chattin air still. And thir Powers etiolated as gnat water.

And Yor creture sez:

—I need a coupla hundred, boss.

Da radio on, drum shakes da plastic dashbord. Fat Tone blazing a spliff. He aint saying nuffin.

Yore creture sez:

—Five years, Tone.

—Wot?

—Retire, innit. I cud a bin out alredy. I tell you bout my legal rep? He had his own supplier, but if I couda got in that... Professhnals, you imagin?

—Bun dat, boys.

—Its trade innit. Blatant. Only way anyone invest in the Fird World. Doze lawyers an media gash Id see—deyre keeping Bolivian pezants alive! I tole you, we shud go Class A. Time the Afghani farmers got in da game. Wot you think? Put your boyz to work.

—Im makin a move myself bruv.

—Giving you a chance to bring in da big dollars innit.

—Nah man. I need ma papers.

Busting ninety quid crepes up on da dash.

—You gonna lose dis geezer. I'll front you da bags.

—Nah man.

—You dont wanna be baddest brer on road?

The air thick wiv fug and edge.

—Im already big in th game.

Yor creature sees, dat bony goofus poized to mark his yard.

—Yeah? Wha is th game?

Dat bony slave not bothered by a deddout older:

—Geezer, I am the game.

And th creture Zak is tracing shaved lines in his hed.

—Yeah? Its all jokes tho, innit? You got som face making da papers, driving flash car, propa don n that. An he cant even leve his yard. Living wiv his mom an everythin. Wats that about?

And Fat Tone seething:

—Its all bless.

Dat slave left them to his bruckup wheels and sloped away.

Somwere on da roof da Followers mimic da singer

quacking about da papers hes stackin, da blocks on hold, his workers n shootas... Somwere on da roof dere busting silat moves, thir Powers as weak as water.

—Yu know how much wele make off a kilo of brown? Kilo and a half. Cane it...

And his spar, whoz almost invizible, took da spliff. And didnt say nuffin.

—Cant be a wasteman all yr life. You wanna be shotting weed for him all day?

—I aint dat any more.

—Wot, you above all that? Dont tell me you still playing yor gay choons with thoz jokers?

—I dunno. Its gonna affect things tho innit.

—Wot you on about? Hows it affect thos Afganis? Theyr looking after themselvz, ennit? You gorra look after yrself in this life...Yeah, but Im puttin back. Check me, Im opening up a hospital on th border. Yu know that? Yeh-man, help da cripples wiv thir legs an s__t. Dats wot this is about. So wot you think?

And his spar is saying nuffink.

And dey silent listening to drum. And Yr slave getting vex wiv Fat Tone and Zak and grimey singers on da radio.

—Who is dis whiney batty don?

—I dunno.

—Dook that little s__t up. I dunno what da yute listning to these days.

And his buzz gone sour.

—You wanna go home?

Dat servant drops Naseeb off back to his yard.

And da Noble Followers emerge from dissipacion. Dey rap thin chill around Yor slave.

And thoh his buzz was sour, and da Followers emerge from dissipacion, Yor creture was too mash to check Aleeshas car. And da Protectors throw a vail over his eyes: were under the jaundisd street lite Aleeshas car had an orange clamp chained to da front weel.

Truly, his hert wud freeze an the ignominy of da weak wud overwhelm! And a hundred bills swirl in his belly.

But da Followers throw a vail over his eyes and he didn see were da council had clampt da front weel.

And in da stairwell he called Ali.

—Salaam, Chaccha! Whassa news, boss?... I thowt you told him that!... I thot you told him that! Get him down man. This geezers worrying me. I cuda found somone myself... How longs he need? Dats bollocks! Im takin it easy! I got peple lined up this end, Im takin it eazy. Tell him he aint getting nu'in til I see it

upfront... He knos we need it upfront. Whatdaaa...

Dat slave cusses and kicks da wall. Wile his uncle jams his hype. Yea, wile his uncle has his back.

—Iss bollocks... Im calm tho, innit. Yeeah, pashiens. Dumbshit. Listen, you keep on him, Chacha. Salaam. All rite. Later.

This grateful lump of love.

Da Protectors wrap thir Powers around.

He saw two spots of color in her cheek he knew wud be ther for days. He needs to find another hiding place.

And she spoke about thir finances. He sez hes wiped out after Pakistan.

Say, she wanna smack his head up *tchaa*, leve scratches on his neck, teeth in his cheek. But she need to take care, she need ta breathe. (He doznt know she need to take care, she need ta breathe. An his sins are not multiplied)

—You remember th woman at Citizens Advice? She sed you have to rite to th banks.

Becoz you told th dole we were shacked up, he thot, and dey closed all my claims; and taxing me six months. A Pataan, wiv da blood of mountain clans, reared to raid da lowlands, jack the women, fight da kuffar, begging th Housing Benefit.

—Im waitin to hear back, he sez.

Yor creture sees da razor blade in da kichen.

He wants to sleep but needed her to go to bed. To go and get his bag o dreams from her car and find another hiding place.

Say, she cud smell it off him. And she was gon to bed.

Yor creetur plugged in Doom 3. And qwikly desends to th dead.

And Hamza sez: *Noble Alif, we's gonna be mongin out tonite.*

And da Followers wandering corridors of the damned with vacant bludlust.

Ech time Yor creature makes a gesture his road forks off; we follow passages branching infinitely, and we will never find our way back.

(Qiyam: 0045 GMT)

At som point Yr creture realized she is standing in the doorway.

Dat servant waits for him to die.

And her Followers fan balm in her face.

He wanted to looze himself in da sepulkers of his game. But shes standing ther.

—I hope theyre helping you to find something. I know what its like to be skint... And yu can stay away from... the others

yu were... coz I cant afford to have it in the flat.

Her eyes water; thow his hackles ar up he is disarmed.

—We cant looz this flat, Nassa... you kno that.

—Safe.

Hav you seen a woman with mercy? Her tears coming and her voyse wobble? Her Folowers, they blow into her face.

—It makes me get crazy wen were like this. I just dont know wat yore doing. You dont tell me, Nassa. You can help me by telling me. If yore not motivated or... it must be hard to start all over and not find... I do appreshiate... Id rather you took a paper round than went bak to all that... I dont mind being the bredwinner.

Tho his hackles are up he is cawt.

—Im sorry I get crazy somtimes. I just dont want to get to th point its just wherever. I dont want us to pretend. You can tell me, Nassa.

Truly, thez cretures hear the Angels listening.

And he flinchd.

—Som day we mite have a kid. It wud be nice for... an make a home. If yuve thot of... We just need to communicate. You can tell me.

—Safe.

—Id like you to tell me. Wat yu want to say. If yu want

to think about it. You can tell me wen you want to say... Did you want to say anything?

Alhamdulillah.

And he is full of wonder. Why did she do that just now? Who was she?

Yor servant stays up wondering how he got here. Today he saw a frog cringing under somwuns wall.

And he cant find wich Naseeb to remember. A yearning spot dat wants to dash th Plan. To sacrifice da Game and go strait to th sunny garden of cripples n pleazantries and fruits of doing Good.

(An he became a saint, sez my Noble Scribe.)

He needed her to sleep. To get da green baby bag from da bedroom n go to her car.

Da creature crept into da room. Wid da Protectors becalming her sleep. But da bag it hisst between da wardrobe and da wall ware he stashed it. And her voyce come slow:

—And remember she sed you can rite to th credit cards.

—I alredy did.

—Do you need th car tomorrow? I need it later.

—Yeah, he sez.

Say, he cant remember why he hadnt written da letters to th banks an cards. But dere was so much to do, so many things.

Who cud do it all? Dey want him to swet all dis pointless stuff. Dey have no idea. He has to do wat his destiny sed. His vizion becom known, his risktaking vindicated. And peple retributed.

And da slave wanted to loze himself in da sepulkers of th game.

He didn know when he slept.

The soul dreamed of taking fifteen hundred arms and legs to Afghanistan.

He was in a factory plant with prosthetic shells sprayed by robots.

Down featureless corridors of a storage centre, the rows of corrugate metal rooms under striplights swaying on wire, where a sad orphan that never found its stump was caged.

The din of metal beaters and furnace, and the corrugate walls and chickenwire ceilings open onto a workshop garage in India. Children in vests and halfshirts gawk at a young man getting his foot keel fitted. And the khaki'd police lounge at the shutters.

And then they play football in the street, the amputee in three-quarter combats bounding along, another small boy with Himalayan eyes galloping on titanium pylon and wooden feet, the children surging fish shoal...

When Yor servant wakes it takes a bit before he realized it waznt real and hes got nothing heroik to tell.

And he rolls out of da sofa to his fones flashing in da unlit living room wiv missed calls from unnown numbers.

And drawn to da spare room, to stand in front of da winda and look at Leeshas car and sense da goods still there, a ghost cum back to unfinished matter. He cud tuch it—da future like a garden o grassy eaze an largess, and companionable hooris with sweet drinks—so hard not to hold it!

And da Protector removed da veil from his eyes, whare under th jaundisd street lite Aleeshas car was gon.

And still he didnt see it.

He wants to go to bed. But his wondering were he parked da car. And sumfing starts lurching thru him. Till hes awake.

And he dozent see the car. But he sees da keys on th table.

And he wen out to the car. Where under the jaundisd lite Aleeshas whip is gone.

And he wandered th streets, coming back to ech one as tho hes made a mistake. As tho dere was a secret slip road in his hed.

But dis was da spot.

An time and space shud be here. (But da Counsil hirelings in thir lorry had come).

Ther is da slave calling on his fones. But no one is awake.
And he has to go back to th flat.

By th leaking liht draping th duvet as it rose and fell wid
her breathing...

Why did she cume to him like that? Like he cud tell her
everything.

And abased, da belever calls out, *Wake up, Leesha. Wake
up. Drag it all out of me. Let me fall on th hollows of yr hips and call
out Save me. Save me, Leesha. Say you forgive me. Coz I cant drag
my life back.*

(Fajr: 0547 GMT)

Say! My Companions sens the enormus wings, da pressure
drop of electric storm. Noble Atid looks at me to say, *The time is
here, our watch is over, till Asr come agen.*

And his account may now be fixt, and deeds alloted to
good n bad.

And Angels of sucesion are passing along a thred to this
relm. But we are alrely asending da Emypreans, pinned back by
da wait of hopeless Mercy, and I hav alrely forgotten. Each time
we return, it is as thoh we were never here. And we too shall be
askd by the Uneeq One, *How did you find My servant? And how
did you leve My servant?*