

## **“Mother’s mouth”**

by Amaal Said (translated from Somali to English)

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Hooyo, what is murug?  
Is it like grief?

Close to grief, but no. It’s when you don’t come home  
on time and my heart starts hurting.  
Grief is when someone dies.

Is it jaah-wereer. Do you lose the four corners  
of the room you are in?

I don’t get dizzy. I sit down at the end of the sofa.  
Sometimes I pace. Sometimes I pick up  
the phone and then put it down again.

Maxa ka xuntahay?  
What do you regret?

What if the children I have run here with  
take for granted everything I have left behind?  
I moved from house to house,  
rode two buses to take you and pick you up from school.

Ha ilaawin.  
Forgetting would break my heart.

Xasuus.  
Remember how I fell pushing your buggy,  
how my knees bled.

And hooyo, bad is xun and rotten is quurmay, right?

Yes. I threw out the bread with the mold  
and the milk that had soured.  
Regret spoils the body. It messes with the stomach.

And Calool-xanuun is an ache in the stomach?

Yes, like the time you told me I didn’t care about you  
and I closed your door slowly, then crept into my bed.  
I didn’t know what to do with myself.

When you told me about the friends  
that laughed as they watched the women  
come from around the corner  
with their shopping bags in town,  
slipping one by one on the ice,

Oohin aa ii gabta.  
Tears held me.  
I held onto the tears.

Wadna-xanuun: Heart-ache.  
ache in the heart.

I don't know what my mother looked like,  
but they told me about her,  
how we both hardened when hurt.

Adkaysa. Xooq yeelo.  
Strengthen. Harden.

So if I die, the house won't die with me.  
So if I die, you can hold the house up.  
So if I die, you won't crumble.

And what do you know about qaajo?

Hunger in the belly. No food when you come home  
from break, no food after the isha prayer.

There was never anyone to be angry at,  
No one to scrunch up the face in sadness for.

I didn't run here for you  
to skip meals,  
to sleep hungry  
because you don't like yourself  
in the mirror.

Ugly: fool-xun.  
Ugly is not thanking God  
And wishing you weren't alive in the body  
you are in.

Ceeb: shame.  
Girl out when the sky is dark.

Brother was waiting outside the house with a stick for me.  
He asked no questions, only began the beating.  
Beat me so bad I still think about it,  
still try to forgive him.

How do you say forgiveness?

Caafis. You say, 'ii caafi'.

My brother came to me in a dream  
with that in his mouth. I stayed by the phone the next morning.  
Even bought a talk home calling card so I could say,  
'I know you didn't mean it. I know.'

The phone call never came.

Welwel:

Worry when you don't know  
how to greet your grandmother on the phone.

Shaki:

Doubt is forbidden.

You must lock yourself around God.

Cabsi:

I fear you'll lose our tongue,

I fear you'll stop coming home to me.