YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME

He points to me with a single finger. "You," he spits, "watch yourself. You and the other pieces of scum no one wants here."

I want to say something back. I can feel the words itching in my throat, but nothing comes out. I remember my mum's warning, almost as if she's right there next to me, saying it again for the hundredth time.

AF DABOOLAN DAHAB WAAYE.
A CLOSED MOUTH IS GOLD.

To my Lord, for blessing me in ways I could never imagine
To Hooyo and Aabo, who have always made life a little brighter
And, to the other loves of my life: thank you for shaping me and for your endless support

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YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME

AYAAN MOHAMUD



USBORNE

YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME

includes scenes of violence and racism
which some readers may find distressing

PART ONE:
AN APPROACHING STORM

CHAPTER ONE

The library at lunchtime.

Without realizing, and without much resistance, that's the kind of person I've become. The lunch bell rang ten minutes ago, and I was supposed to go meet my friends, but for some reason I'm still here at this empty desk in this near-empty library, trying to make a dent in this never-ending study list.

The date in my planner glares at me. I'm four weeks away from my med school admissions test and I can feel its nearness starting to bite at my heels. But I know if I don't turn up like I promised, my friends will have words for me, so I shove the planner in my bag and head out.

I see some of the others from my double maths lesson hanging around under the canopies and by the field outside. I don't see Jessica though, which is good. I try to avoid Jessica as much as realistically possible in this school, even though we share a few classes.

I already saw too much of her this morning. She'd capitalized on my best friend's absence, leaning over Andrea's empty chair when she'd noticed me flicking through the mock paper Ms Williams had handed back to us. Her hair was braided intricately,

as it always was, and if you didn't know Jessica you'd probably think, *Hey, there's a friendly looking girl. She seems pretty harmless.*

"You really shouldn't worry," she'd whispered, leaning in close and keeping an eye out for Ms Williams. She indicated the mock paper in front of me with a nod of her head. "It's not the end of the world. There are plenty options."

I ignored her, but Jessica carried on.

"Look, I just mean that even if your grades don't work out and you need to fall back on something, I'm sure ISIS could use a marketing strategist. They could use your skill set."

I pursed my lips but didn't say anything. I knew if Andrea had been there, she definitely would've gone off on her. She's never been the type to let anything go, especially when it comes to Jessica and her snarkiness. But me? No, no, no. I stayed silent. I always stayed silent. It was easier that way. Easier to let these little jabs slide off you, like water over glass, than let any of it get to you.

So, I didn't tell her that I got ninety-five per cent – the highest in the class – along with three of Ms Williams's coveted smiley faces.

And my mum's words, her simple life-motto, rang in the back of my head as I watched Jessica's retreating back at the end of class.

Don't make more trouble opening your mouth, Hanan. Af daboolan dahab waaye.

I've heard it so many times growing up that it's become the theme song to my life. *A closed mouth is gold.* It sounds a lot better in Somali though.

I snake through the lunchtime crowd to find my friends, keeping an eye out for Jessica and her co-Braids. They're the other two girls in that toxic trio; three cut-throat girls with the hair of angels. All living, breathing, walking contradictions.

"Hanan, get over here!" Nasra calls out from the pigpen when she sees me walking across the courtyard. She's there with the rest of our friends, still waving frantically even though she knows she's already gotten my attention, so I head towards them.

The pigpen's a seating area with a few picnic tables for people who aren't in the mood for the chaos of the lunch hall. Its pointed blue wooden fences and latched gate always gives us the feeling of being kept animals, which is why we call it the "pigpen". It never stops us from hanging around here most days though.

Nasra's perched on the fence. I'm a little surprised that its pointed edges aren't causing her any pain. But then again, Nasra once broke her foot in a vicious game of bench-ball and spent the entire day attempting to walk on it just to prove to everyone else that it wasn't that serious.

"I'm so glad you're here," Nasra says when I reach them, extending her arms.

I lean in without question. Nasra's a chronic hugger and any hesitation in indulging her demands usually leads to questions about the integrity of our friendship.

"These two are such antisocial trash," she says, releasing me and indicating Lily and Isha, who are both absorbed with their phones. "I've had no one to talk to for the last five minutes,"

she complains. She slides off her gold-rimmed glasses, cleaning the lenses with the edge of her headscarf, and makes a face.

I laugh. "How is it that you make five minutes sound like five hours, Nasra?"

"Excuse you, I'm asking for support here, not judgement, Hanan," she replies drily, squinting at me. "Those two are the ones you should be looking at."

At that, Isha finally looks up, pocketing her phone.

She smiles sheepishly. "Sorry, sorry," she says. "Do you guys know the kind of dedication and commitment it takes to run an established Jimin fan account? It's basically a full-time job."

"Don't you have like fifty followers on that BTS account?" I ask.

Nasra bursts out laughing.

Isha gives her a side-eye as she draws out her favourite cherry blossom lip-gloss from her blazer, applying a generous amount. If she could have it her way, she'd be wearing full-face make-up every day for school, but she makes do with what she can get away with.

"I *did* have fifty, but I'll have you know I've got that number up to eighty-one now."

"Impressive," Nasra says, smirking. "We're going to have to throw you a party when you finally hit a hundred."

They fall into their typical light-hearted bickering, and I lean back against the fence to watch. Normally, Andrea and Lily are watching with me, but Andrea's out sick today and Lily's still glued to her phone.

It's moments like this when I'm surprised at just how well

Nasra's adjusted to our group. She only started at Grafton Grammar last year for sixth form, but it feels like she's been with us for ever.

I think back to how it all started: Andrea and me. Then the addition of Isha four years ago, in Year Nine, after her dad moved their family back from India. Then Lily, not long after that. She and Jessica had had a falling-out, after years of being friends, and one day she somehow ended up at a table with us. She's refused to ever tell us what made her walk away from that friendship, even though we've asked more times than I can count.

Andrea had had her reservations when Lily first transitioned to our group. I remember just how much time and energy it took to convince her to give Lily the benefit of the doubt.

"She was with them but never *with* them," I'd argued. "You know she's never been as bad as Jessica, Sarah or Divya. And I feel a little bad. She doesn't have anyone to hang out with."

"The fact that she used to be a Braid, and not whether she was as *bad* as them, should be argument enough, but whatever, Hanan." Andrea had thrown up her hands in defeat. "You win. Lily can join."

I look over at her now, still typing away frantically on her phone.

"What's she so obsessed with?" I ask Isha, interrupting her conversation with Nasra.

"She's texting her mum," Isha replies. "They're planning a trip to some town in Switzerland they're yet to visit."

The three of us smile at each other knowingly; Lily's

extravagant weekend trips happen at least once a month with her millionaire candle-creator mum, so we're all used to them by now. Most people wonder what Lily's doing at a place like this when they find out who her mum is, but it makes more sense when you know her mum went to Grafton thirty years ago too.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I slide it out.

Hooyo: GET GIRLS SCHOOL
HUSSEIN SAY NO

I sigh. I'd been planning an afternoon in the library to study up on the physics that'll be in my exam, but I guess that won't be happening now.

"What are you moping about?" Isha asks.

"Just a text from my mum." I shrug my shoulders, quickly putting my phone away. "Apparently I'm on pick-up duty today."

"Isn't it your brother's turn this week?" Lily asks, finally acknowledging my presence. She clicks on a few more things before locking her phone and putting it away.

Nasra barks out a laugh. "Funny you should break focus when her brother comes up."

Lily swats her arm. "It's just an innocent question. Can't a girl ask about her friend's life without being harassed?"

I raise an eyebrow when I notice the red creeping into her cheeks. "Yeah, it was supposed to be his turn. Not sure what he's playing at, but I guess I'll find out when I get home."

"I could come over to yours and help you figure it out,

if you'd like," Lily replies, trying to appear nonchalant. She plays with a lock of her new pixie cut, twisting it around her finger.

I stifle a laugh. It's always the same with her whenever Hussein comes up. I can never quite understand what it is about him that seems so compelling. To me, he'll always just be the laziest clean-freak I know.

"Lily, you and my brother are never happening. The sooner you accept that, the quicker we can all move on with our lives."

"Never." She pouts. "I refuse to give up. Haven't you heard? Love conquers all."

Nasra looks at her with disdain and snorts. "Haven't *you* heard? Love actually *kills* all. Look at what happened to Romeo and Juliet. Both too dumb in love to stay alive for it. And anyway, Lily, stop creeping on your best friend's twin brother. You might as well claim you're in love with this one, too, because they're basically identical," she says, indicating me.

"Oh my God, Nasra! We're not identical." I let my head drop into my hands. "This is why you shouldn't have dropped biology."

"Please, I'm not that clueless." She smiles widely at me. "It's just hilarious seeing you get so worked up."

I'm about to reply when we hear the whine of sirens. We all look up at the same time, like startled meerkats. The ear-splitting noise gets closer and closer, until we see the flashing lights of an ambulance whizz past the school gates. When the sound begins to melt away, I turn back to Nasra and say, "I'm not as easy to wind up—"

I'm cut off again by more sirens. Not an ambulance this time but one, two…no, *four* police cars. I see bursts of red, white and blue through the bushes. They disappear in seconds, and we're left with the quiet rumble of regular traffic once more.

"That doesn't sound good," Isha says, craning her neck like she can see where the police cars were heading from where we're standing.

One or two police cars? Normal. But four police cars and an ambulance? That means something bad, even for London.