

Sharmarke

Sharmake, a young Somali Muslim, is standing at a bus stop waiting to get to hospital to visit his father. He was angry on his last visit and the staff asked him to leave.

Remember what Warsan keeps telling me. Breathe. And count to ten if I start to get anxious. Which I will. But it's going to be alright. I can give my father this phone and now he'll be able to listen to the verses from the Quran and that will soothe him.

Keep calm. That's the thing. Don't let my father down again. Don't get angry again. Try not to be scared again. But he can always see when I am hiding things. 'What is it Sharmarke? What is it you are not telling me?'

I should be at his bedside looking after him, doing my duty as a good son. But instead I make him worry. And what can I say to him? That I am being called up in the middle of the night to be told to come to work. That they pay so little. That I worry that somebody will report me; that I will be sent back, and he'll be left here all alone.

And he is always apologising to me. Over and over. 'I am so sorry. Why has this happened to me? What will happen to you, with no-one by your side? How can I fight it?' And again I will try and calm him. 'Listen abo, the letter will be arriving soon saying that we can both stay here'.

But you never know when you get to the hospital how things have been. If he's had a bad night or is confused again. Maybe he hasn't been able to explain to anyone that he needs the toilet or that he can't eat the food they've given him. And what happens if he's no better? What happens if he never gets better? What will happen to his body? How can I bury him in the proper way?

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

I know I was wrong to react like that, but I was so tired, and he looked so weak, and I didn't know why the Doctor was asking those things of me. How could he use those words? These things are in Allah's hands! Why were they giving up on my father? So quickly; so easily. Did they need the bed for someone else; someone who comes from this country? I was wrong to shout; to lash out, but why was there nobody there to help me understand what they meant?

I was sure the police would be sent to find me because of what happened. I didn't dare go back. I didn't even go to the mosque and pray for my father because I had to work. It was Warsan who came to look for me and took me to the Community Centre to get some advice. But nobody was really able to explain to me what is happening and what am I supposed to do.

Walaahi' I've never felt so frightened. Thinking that his bed would be empty when I finally went back to the hospital. But there he was, sitting up, waiting and worried. What kind of person can do that to their own father? He looked terrible. And the nurse who I pushed over said they could see that I was struggling, that all they wanted was to help us both deal with the situation as best as we could. And the Doctor needed to ask us some difficult questions as soon as possible. Not now I said. Tomorrow. Please.

And now it is tomorrow, and I will listen to the Doctor and I will breathe. And father can now listen to the Quran. And maybe Allah will be looking down on us and listening to our prayers. The letter will be waiting for us when I get back. With good news. And whatever happens today insha'allah will be for the best.