

## A LETTER TO MY MA

Fatima Saeed

You ask me how it is that Paapa never write all this time. I tell you all now and I telling it fact. We get to Kano safe by bus and meet the new smuggle man. He bribe the officers at Niger border and they letting us pass without no papers.

Paapa money is stole in the Niger man house all of us stay but we not fit argue, so I sharing my own with him.

We enter truck to Agadez next day careful so we never fall and die in Sahara desert cos no one even be stopping to bury you or say the Lord's over you. In Agadez we wait four days for truck to Libya. Our skin become black and we cannot see proper cos of morning to night hot sun. You not knowing me, your first son if you see me. I looking like dried up corpse.

We get truck finally but on the way bandit stop us. All of us come down lining up. \$5 per person they say with their guns facing us. We all pay until is Paapa turn to be giving his own but he start to shake. The bandit point gun at him and shout, you no want to give Boubacar his money boy?

I whisper ask Paapa for his money. Him telling me he spend it for Agadez when we wait for truck and I not around. He spend it on Coke and porridge.

I having only \$5 remaining for last stop and I cannot giving it for Paapa so I fall at Boubacar feet for hot dry ground and begging for mercy. I be thinking he let us go and I happy but he raise gun and blow two bullet into Paapa head. I scream and scream till I not fit make a sound no more.

They order us into truck and we driving away. Nobody even be covering Paapa body.

So you see Ma, two bullets be doing it for Paapa and not God  
nor devil be able to stop it that day.

## **BUBBLE GUM AND BOURBON**

**David Daniel**

One time when my friend Jim visited from Australia with his wife, the two of them and my wife and I sat in our kitchen smoking dope and drinking Four Roses from mismatched bone-china teacups. Jim and Sandi were a handsome pair, tall, good-looking, brown from the Australian sun. She was an artist, made the silver jewelry she was wearing. Jim brought the bourbon. I provided the weed. Someone had a pack of Hubba Bubba bubble gum, I don't remember who. We all started blowing bubbles.

Every few minutes one of us – me, Grace, Jim, or Sandi – would say in a cowboy drawl, 'Big bubbles, nooo troubles,' and we'd crack up. It was an advertising slogan, and no matter how often someone said it, it seemed funny and we would laugh.

Whiskey, weed, and bubble gum don't often go together, but maybe it was a way of Jim and me getting reacquainted after so long. We had been stationed together in the army years before. Or perhaps our wives needed to be acquainted. Maybe it was escape. Maybe it was just a veiled, funny, vaguely sexy thing to say, and would, over time, like so many things, lose its meaning. Maybe it meant nothing at all. In time both Grace and Sandi would become ex-wives, or Jim and I ex-husbands, but that day, in that kitchen, merriment reigned.

'Big bubbles, nooo troubles,' one of us would drawl and we'd all be laughing, the bubbles billowing out like pink balloons.