

TWELVE

CHILD OF ADAM IS a clinging clot. I am the dust of the ground. And you are the breath of life. Salaam alaikum, Kahlil. Come and breathe in your mother. You emerge from her womb in the year two thousand and fifteen with an ancient frown. She has powered through her contractions at home and is eight centimetres dilated by the time we reach the hospital. ‘You’re a miracle worker,’ the midwife tells her. But your mother does not believe in miracles before you are born ... She takes in the deepest breath and pushes and screams as you make your way through her body. I am right here by her side, my hands beneath her hair and around her neck, and my forehead firmly against her brow, which is burning in sweat. I say these words – words I have only ever meant for this woman, ‘Love beckoned us, and we followed her, though her ways were hard and steep. And when her wings enfolded us, we yielded to her, though the sword hidden among her pinions wounded us. And when she spoke to us, we believed in her, though her voice had shattered our dreams as the north wind laid waste the garden. Even as love crowned

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us, she crucified us. Even as she was for our growth, so was she for our pruning. Like sheaves of corn she gathered us unto herself. She threshed us to make us naked. She sifted us to free us from our husks. She grinded us to whiteness.’ Your mother pants and thrusts and the yellow at the centre of the blue in her irises explodes into stardust. She screams out your name for the very first time – *Kablil* – as your face erupts from between her legs: you have her soft lips, and your tayta’s desert eyelashes, and your jidoo’s angry wrinkles, and your grandfather’s chubby earlobes, and your grandmother’s fragile skin, and your father’s enormous nose – the nose I had before my nose job, which I miss so much at the sight of you. The midwife tosses you straight into your mother’s arms, and I hear your mother cry to no one but herself, ‘Thank you, God.’ And as you lie there against her chest, against that heartbeat that you have come to know so well, covered in her blood and your own shit, I weep uncontrollably, as though my soul is pouring out through my eyes. Any mistakes that brought me to this moment, I would not hesitate to make again.