

silent verses

penned by

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EXT. STREETS - AFTERNOON

The air is filled with hum of activity. A radio crackles in the background, playing a Hausa song.

Across the street, a group of students, still in their uniforms, three of them on bicycles while two without any.

One of the boys on bicycle took one of the boys on his bicycle and ride away, the group immediately takes in pursuit while the only boy left run along. The shout of laughter and shouts fades into the bustling background of the town.

EXT. STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The chase comes to an abrupt halt in an open, dusty edge of the town. The boy with no bicycle, SUNNIE (13), appears, panting hard as he stumbles into them, hands on his knees struggling to breath.

SUNNIE

Sani?!

SANI (13), the boy carrying another boy on his bicycle turns towards Sunnie.

SUNNIE (CONT'D)

You guys have been riding round town, can i ride now too?

SANI

Where is yours?, Didn't you say your dad would bring yours?

SUNNIE stands numb avoiding eye contact with the boys.

BOY 1

You were lying Sunnie, you do that a lot, or your dad can't just afford to get you one.

Sunnie kicks the boys bicycle hardly. The boy steps down from his bicycle, hits Sunnie on his chest. They both keep pulling and pushing each other as the other boys tries to separate them.

As the fight continues, SADIQ (17), rides past on his blue bicycle. He stares straight ahead, peddling steadily without noticing the fight. The noise fades as Sadiq disappears down the street.

FADE TO BLACK.

Title card: 'Silent Verses'

FADE IN:

INT. MADRASAH - EVENING

The class is filled with hum and recitation of students. Boys of varying but close ages sits on the wooden chairs.

Sadiq, sits alone close to the window with a Quran placed on his desk. Their TEACHER (28), standing at the front signals them to stop, the class becomes silent with the only hum coming from nearby classes.

TEACHER

Now you would read individually,
who would start?

They stare at each other divisively. One of the boys stands up. The teacher walk back to his seat and sits.

BOY

Recites the Quran.

Few seconds later he stops.

TEACHER

Who is next?

He looks at their faces, then at Sadiq. Sadiq is writing in Arabic on a paper placed on his desk.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

You Sadiq...read.

He reluctantly stands up, everybody's eye turns towards him.

SADIQ

(stammering)

Bismillahi rahmanil rahim...

The Teacher's calm gaze reassures him to continue.

As he attempts to continue, the other student laughs cautiously. The teacher glares towards them and there is silence again. Sadiq keeps struggling.

TEACHER

Sit down. You.

The Teacher gazes settles at one of the boys, tilts his head gesturing at the student. The boys stands up.

Sadiq stares outside the window lost in thought, he could barely hear or even pay attention in the class.

Moments later, the tap on his desk brings him back to reality. It's the teacher. Every other student taking their bags and walking out of the class.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

You have just eight days left to your Qur'anic competition, can you still do this?

Sadiq attempt to respond but holds back.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Surat Taha, verse 25 to 28. That's the Prophet Musa's prayer.

The Teacher walks away while Sadiq stares at him. He picks up his bag and walk out.

INT./EXT. COMPOUND/SITTING ROOM - EVENING

The compound is littered with some empty buckets and worn-out slippers. Clothesline crisscross the yard, heavy with laundry swaying in the breeze.

MAMA SUNNIE (early 30s) stands by her door with a young MAN (28) standing close and attentively listening to her.

MAMA SUNNIE

He was supposed to come back yesterday but he didn't, and I have been trying to get him through the phone but his number isn't going.

MAN

Do you have any idea where he would have gone to?

MAMA SUNNIE

Honestly I don't, if i do i would have gone there to look for him.

Her voice wavers slightly.

MAN

What was your last conversation before he left for work yesterday?

MAMA SUNNIE

His last conversation was actually with his son Sunnie, he promised to come back with a bicycle for him.

MAN

Okay, He is an adult, he is probably somewhere, you need to stop stressing yourself for now. Toh, i would report to the town head and the vigilante, we would see what we can do.

Sunnie approaches them. His shirt is stained and dust on his trousers and feet. His eyes fixed on the ground while clutching his bag loosely.

MAN (CONT'D)

(gently)

Sunnie?

Sunnie ignores him and passes through the door behind his Mom. The man turns back to Mama Sunnie.

MAN (CONT'D)

Okay, later.

MAMA SUNNIE

Okay, thank you very much sir.

He walks away. Mama SUNNIE walk back into the house.

SUNNIE is sitting on the worn-out couch looking down. The room looks small and scanty.

MAMA SUNNIE (CONT'D)

Why are you just coming back now and why is your uniform this dirty?

No response.

MAMA SUNNIE (CONT'D)

Are you not the one i am talking to?

He doesn't responds. She walks closer to him.

MAMA SUNNIE (CONT'D)

And see how dirty your uniform is. Now before i open my eyes, i want you to go out, pull this uniform and wash it.

She closes her eyes. SUNNIE runs out. She opens her eyes, drops herself on the couch, moves her head back and forth. Her eyes dart to the clock on the wall, runs her hands through her hair, and exhales deeply. Sunnie walks back in slowly.

SUNNIE
Mom...the bicycle dad promised
me...

MAMA SUNNIE
Jesus! Can't you see what's
happening? Leave here!

Sunnie runs out.

INT./EXT. ROOM/COMPOUND - MORNING

The room is simple and small. A low mattress lies on the floor next to a wooden shelf holding Islamic texts and books as the early morning sun strikes towards them.

Sadiq sits on a praying mat with the Quran on his hand. His lips keeps struggling to read from its. He stops, His JUNIOR SISTER(9) walks in.

SADIQ'S SISTER
Brother Sadiq, dad is calling you.

She walks out. As Sadiq attempts to stand up, His FATHER storms in.

SADIQ'S DAD
Didn't i just sent someone to call
you? What's is wrong with you?

Sadiq attempts to respond but struggles.

SADIQ'S DAD (CONT'D)
I won't tolerate this behavior from
you. Are you planning to drop out
of the qur'anic competition?

Sadiq doesn't responds.

SADIQ'S DAD (CONT'D)
You are not different from every
kid that has been doing it.

His MOM (30s) from the Kitchen interrupts.

SADIQ'S MOM (O.S.)
Be patient with him please. Not
like he isn't putting any effort
to.

SADIQ'S DAD
How is he suppose to face the crowd
with this struggle? Does he wants
to disgrace me?

SADIQ'S MOM (O.S.)
And what effort have you put in
place to help him overcome this? I
can't believe we are having this
conversation over something that is
a disorder.

SADIQ'S DAD
(to Sadiq)
You either find a way to do this or
i send you to Almajiranci, you wont
give them this excuses over there.

The Dad walks out leaving Sadiq.

SADIQ'S DAD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Is he the first person with this?

SADIQ'S MOM (O.S.)
But he is the first to be your son.

SADIQ'S DAD (O.S.)
If he doesn't work on it, i would
just send him to meet the Almajirai
in my hometown, he won't be giving
any excuses to their mallam over
there.

SADIQ'S MOM (O.S.)
I won't let that happen.

SADIQ'S DAD (O.S.)
Just like many other people have
gone there and survived, he would
too.

Without a word, Sadiq the door open and run out.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

A deserted road. Sunnie on his school uniform and bag drags his feet as he takes each step against the dusty ground. His gaze fixed on his legs.

Suddenly someone knocks him out of the way to make way for himself. It is Sadiq. Sunnie stumbles but catches his balance. He hisses quietly.

Sadiq a few steps ahead slows down and turn towards Sunnie.

SADIQ

What did you say?

Sunnie doesn't responds. Sadiq rushes him and shoves him to the dusty ground his eyes blazing of frustration. Satisfied, Sadiq walks away leaving Sunnie laying on the floor powerless with his eyes directly into the sky.

EXT. SUNNIE'S HOUSE - COMPOUND - EVENING

The compound looks chaotic with buckets and worn-out cloths on the cloth line. Music can be heard coming from one of the rooms. Few kids walk around.

SUNNIE' MOM (O.S.)

See how dirty you look, was this how you went out this morning?

No response.

SUNNIE' MOM (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You would wash your cloths yourself now. Pick that bucket over there and go grind it at Mama Praises shop. If anybody asks you about your father, anything, tell them you don't know.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Sunnie walks across the street with a yellow bucket. He sights someone approaching with a bicycle, it is Sadiq. Sadiq rides past without a glance, disappearing down the road. Sunnie exhales.

INT. CLASS - EVENING

The classroom is chaotic. Some students sit idly, others roam the room, their noise filling the air. Sadiq sitting alone, rises to leave.

As he steps forward, a boy sticks his leg out, tripping Sadiq. He stumbles, hitting his hand on a desk. As he tries to confront the boy, he just mockingly imitates him. Without warning, Sadiq throws a punch at the boy on his nose.

TEACHER (O.C.)

Kai Sadiq!

INT. CLASS - CONTINUOUS

Sadiq and the boy stand close to the teachers table.

TEACHER

What happened?

SADIQ

(stammering)

I.....

BOY

I did nothing to him and he just threw a punch at me.

The Teacher turn towards other students

TEACHER

Is it true?

The boys glance at each other.

BOY 2

Yes.

The Teacher picks up his whip, whips Sadiq several strokes.

EXT. OUTSIDE/MADRASAH COMPOUND - EVENING

Sunnie come across a collection of bicycles sitting close to the entrance, he takes a peep around only to see people going about their businesses, he sits down looking at them while fidgeting.

Few minutes later...He pick up one of them belonging to Sadiq pushing it away.

EXT. MADRASAH - DAWN

Two boys (18) walk towards the entrance gate, as they pick their bicycles, Sadiq approaches them.

SADIQ
(stammering)
Please did you guys see my bicycle?

BOY 1
(mimicking)
Please did you guys see my bicycle?

They laugh at him.

BOY 1 (CONT'D)
Go find it where you kept it.

They both ride away leaving Sadiq there bewildered. He walk around looking corners and the whole environment for some seconds then walks away.

INT./EXT. SITTING ROOM/COMPOUND - DAWN

Sunnie's mom stands by the door while going through her hand bag to find the keys. After few seconds of checking, she move to the back door, opens it and walk in.

Sunnie arrives with the bicycle, his mom watch carefully as he quietly pushes the bicycle to the back door. As he opens the door, he finds her standing there waiting for him.

SUNNIE'S MOM
Where did you get that from?

He stands quietly with a guilt ridden gaze.

SUNNIE'S MOM (CONT'D)
You had to go ask for someone else's. You would have to learn how to be patient and i would teach you that today.

She drags him into the room, locked the door before he try's to escape. She whipped him mercilessly while he screams begging for mercy.

SUNNIE (O.S.)
Mama please, i wont do it again, i promise. Mama pleaseee.

SUNNIE'S MOM (O.S.)

Tomorrow morning i want you to go
call the owner to come take his
bicycle, I wont accept apologies
next time.

SUNNIE'S MOM (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Sit back there, you are going
nowhere.

Sunnie's sobs.

EXT. COMPOUND - EVENING

Sadiq stands numb with his bag on his hands while his dad
scolds him.

SADIQ'S DAD

This is not the first time that you
are being careless. Careless with
everything i have given you. Are
you a fool?, go find that bicycle
wherever you kept it! Or else you
would start using your legs to walk
to wherever.

Sadiq just stands there uncomfortably looking at the floor.
The dad drives his car out of the house. Sadiq's Mom walk
towards Sadiq.

SADIQ'S MOM

Don't mind him, take this and go
with a bike. Close the gate.

She hands him a few cash and he collects.

EXT. STREETS - EVENING

A group of BOYS kick a worn-out football back and forth.
Sunnie sits by the side, his eyes fixed at a particular
route.

As time drags on, no one come. He sighs, looking at the boys
playing. With a slow and reluctant motion, he joins them with
all his attention. A bike passes by with Sadiq sitting at the
back.

EXT. MADRASAH - EVENING

Sadiq walk gently into the class. He walks towards the
teacher while the students take glances at him.

SADIQ
 (stammering)
 Peace be upon you teacher.

The teacher stares with patience.

TEACHER
 Peace be upon you too. Why are you
 late?

Sadiq does not responds. Then...

SADIQ
 (stammering)
 You didn't explain to me how to
 work with the prayer the other day.

The teacher nods in agreement.

TEACHER
 That's Prophet Musa's dua. It helps
 in easing communication. Take a sit
 first.

Sadiq walks towards his seat.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Sunnie walks slowly glancing at his dusty feet. Out of nowhere, a tap on his shoulder startles him. Sunnie turns quickly, it is Sadiq.

SADIQ
 (stammering)
 I am sorry for what i did to you
 the other day. Do you forgive me?

Sunnie just keep looking at him as he tries to speak. Sadiq stops and continue walking.

SUNNIE
 Wait.

Sadiq stops.

SUNNIE (CONT'D)
 Follow me let me show you
 something.

With a confusion on Sadiq's face, he follows him.

INT. SITTING ROOM - EVENING

A faded rug covers part of the broken concrete floor, two filled-up sacks are stacked by the corner. The only source of light is the single bulb in the ceiling. MAMA FATI (30s), a neighbor, sits on the couch.

MAMA FATI

You've even brought new garri, why haven't you start advertising it for us?

She sits while SUNNIE'S Mom stands. She sighs as Mama Fati listens.

SUNNIE'S MOM

It is Sunnie's father.

She blinks rapidly, a faint tremor in her hands as she holds them together. Mama Fati stands up and walk close to her.

MAMA FATI

What happened?

SUNNIE'S MOM

He went out for work two days ago and he still haven't returned.

MAMA FATI

Ahn ahn, he is not a kid, he is probably somewhere.

SUNNIE'S MOM

That's not the issue, i feel bad about this one, i have been trying his phone but it isn't going through, this is unlike him.

MAMA FATI

So why didn't you tell us earlier?

Sunnie's mom hesitates.

EXT. COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

The evening sky is deep yellow as Sadiq and Sunnie approaches the compound. They stop at a point, and Sunnie hesitates for a moment before glancing at Sadiq.

Mama Sunnie walks out.

SADIQ
(stammering)
Good evening ma

SUNNIE'S MOM
Good evening.

SUNNIE
He is the owner of the bicycle.

SUNNIE'S MOM
So you are the one who gave him
your bicycle?

Sadiq hesitates, turns towards Sunnie and nods in agreement.

SUNNIE'S MOM (CONT'D)
Please don't give him again, i
don't have any means to pay you
back if he spoils it. Go and bring
it out for him.

SADIQ
(stammering)
I actually have giving it out to
him, i don't need it anymore.

SUNNIE' MOM
Really? Hope there is no problem?

SADIQ
(stammering)
Y...

She stares at him for some seconds. Mama Fati steps out to.
Sunnie walks away to get the bicycle.

MAMA FATI
(to mama SUNNIE)
Ahn ahn, What is happening Mama
Sunnie?

Mama Sunnie walk towards her leaving Sadiq.

MAMA FATI (CONT'D)
You know what, just sit at home, i
would go and inform other women and
see where we can start from.

She pats SUNNIE's mom and quickly walk out.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sadiq and Sunnie walk silently while Sadiq pushes the bicycle. Sadiq keep throwing glances at Sunnie's legs.

SADIQ

So why did you carry the bicycle,
is it because of what i did to you
the other day?

Sadiq glances at Sunnie's face while Sunnie avoids looking back.

SUNNIE

Not really, My dad promised to get
me a bicycle for a long time and he
still has not gotten it for me. He
was supposed to bring it two days
ago but we don't have any idea
where he is now.

SADIQ

(stammering)
You know stealing isn't right?

SUNNIE

I am not a thief.

SUNNIE (CONT'D)

Is that how you speak or you are
just joking?

No response for some seconds.

SADIQ

(stammering)
If i was joking then i should have
been done by now.

SUNNIE

I know how you can make speaking
easier.

Sadiq doesn't respond but interested in what Sunnie would say next.

SUNNIE (CONT'D)

Talk slowly and gently. Only speak
when you are comfortable to. It
works a lot.

SADIQ
 (stammering)
 How did you know this?

SUNNIE
 I know someone who stutters too,
 believe me.

Sadiq tries talking slowly.

SADIQ
 Tell...me...more.

SUNNIE
 (smiling)
 You see!

Sadiq hops on the bicycle and signals Sunnie to follow.
 Sunnie hops too and they ride away.

EXT. STREETS - EVENING (MONTAGE)

The town hums lie as Sadiq and Sunnie ride down a bustling road on the bicycle. Sadiq pedals steadily, focused on the path ahead, while Sunnie sits behind him on the frame, gripping him tight.

SADIQ (V.O.)
 (stammering less)
 This is yours now.

SUNNIE (V.O.)
 Seriously?

SADIQ (V.O.)
 (stammering less)
 Yes. It is now yours

SUNNIE (V.O.)
 Thank you! How about we go look for
 my dad.

SADIQ (V.O.)
 (stammering less)
 Good idea, where do you think we
 can find him?

SUNNIE
 He works at the leather factory
 across the express, we can check
 there.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The church is modest but lively, with plastic chairs arranged in rows and columns. Women in colorful wrappers and scarves fill the seats. Sunnie's Mother is one of them.

At the pulpit stands the PASTOR (40s).

PASTOR

As the lord told Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the lord?" (Exodus 4:11)

The congregation nods and murmurs in agreement.

PASTOR (CONT'D)

The lord does not call the perfect.
He equips those He has called.
Whatever burden you carry, trust in Him, for he has chosen you for a purpose.

The choir led by Matan Zumunta rises and begins to sing, their voices blending in harmony. Sunnie's mother closes her eyes while singing along.

INT. SITTING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sunnie's mom picks up her phone to make a call.

ON PHONE

The number you are trying to call is not available.

As she is about to drop the phone, SUNNIE'S DAD (30s) walk in dragging his feet.

SUNNIE'S MOM

(bemusedly)

Jesus! What happened?

She run towards him and gives him a hug.

INT. SITTING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sunnie's Mom and Dad sits on the couch while she keeps checking him.

SUNNIE'S DAD
 (stammering)
 Where is Sunnie?

SUNNIE'S MOM
 He just went out.

SUNNIE'S DAD
 (stammering)
 God, the police took all the money
 and left me with nothing. Thank God
 some of our neighbors found me. How
 do i get him the bicycle i promised
 now?

SUNNIE'S MOM
 That shouldn't be your worry, God
 would make a way, the good thing is
 you are back. Let me get you
 something to eat. Thank you Jesus.

She hurriedly walks out.

INT. MADRASAH - AFTERNOON

A chair with a desk is placed at the front with two bulbs,
 red and green. The noise from the audience can be heard.

MAN (O.C.)
 So, the next student on our list is
 Abubakar Sadiq Imam.

Sadiq dressed in a traditional regalia walk towards the chair
 and sits down. He uses his fingers to gently tap on the table
 continuously.

MAN (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 "...and grant me a helper from my
 family."

SADIQ
 (to himself)
 "My lord, expand for me my breast,
 and make my task easy for me and
 untie the knot from my tongue that
 they may understand my speech."

SADIQ (CONT'D)
 (stammers less)
 Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim...

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The sky is dim. Sadiq still dressed up without the regalia and Sunnie ride the bicycle down the nearly empty road. Sunnie is behind the pedal.

SUNNIE (V.O.)
Do you think we would find him?

SADIQ
(stammering less)
We will try. That's all that matters right?

SUNNIE
Yeah.

FADE TO BLACK.

Sunnie chuckles.

SADIQ
(stammering less)
Why are you laughing? Oh watch your front.

They both laugh as they disappear down the road, the sound of the wheels and their laughter fading.

The End.