Dhegdheer
A Scary Somali Folktale

retold by Marian A. Hassan
illustrated by Betsy Bowen

MINNESOTA HUMANITIES CENTER SOMALI BILINGUAL BOOK PROJECT
The Somali Bilingual Book Project is dedicated to all refugee children and their families. Many thanks to those who shared stories to make this project possible.

Mashruuca Buuggaga af-Soomaalgiga ee labada-af ah, waxa loo hibeyey dhamaan carruurta qaxootiga ah oo dhan iyo qoysaskooda. Way ku mahadsan yiiin dadkii sheekooyinkooda noo soo bandhigay ee suurta galiyey hirgelinta mashruucan.

In honor of Barbara Knutson
and her love of the stories of the world. — BB

The Somali Bilingual Book Project is a component of the Minnesota Humanities Commission's Bilingual and Heritage Language Programs. These programs strengthen families' English literacy skills while recognizing and supporting the role of families' home languages in early literacy development. Through these programs, MHC reaches out to K-6 teachers, parent educators, early childhood educators, librarians, social service providers, and other literacy professionals. Bilingual and Heritage Language programs: connect educators to existing resources that enhance language development; offer professional development on oral traditions and the connection between language and culture; and collaborate with community representatives to develop new culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. The Somali Bilingual Book Project initially includes the publication of four traditional Somali folktales—The Lion's Share, Dheegheer, The Travels of Igal Shiddad, and Will Woal—in hardcover and paperback editions and a dual-language audio recording of all four stories.

Visit www.mnshumanities.org to download free online resources for use in educational settings.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006926620

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2
First Edition

Printed in the United States of America.
Wuxuu lajo duwan lacag United States of America.
Author's Note

A favorite Somali folktale, Dhegdheer has been passed down through many generations. Like the "boogey man" from European folklore, Dhegdheer is used to "scare" children into good behavior. Families caution their children: Don't wander out alone or Dhegdheer is going to get you. The story of Dhegdheer imparts the very important message of good and evil. Essentially, it illustrates the idea that we are protected by universal justice, which is at work all the time.

Dhegdheer is told in many versions throughout the different regions of Somalia. In the most common version, Dhegdheer dies at the hand of her daughter. In this retelling, that ending has been changed to one in which a greater force intervenes.

Ereyga Qoraaga

Dhegdheer waa mid ka mid ah kuwa loogu jecel yahay sheeko xariirooyinka Soomaalida. Waa sheeko qarniyo badan jiilba jiil u gudbinaaye, sida sheeka-xariirta reer Yurub ee "boogey man" oo ku saabsan nin lago baqo. Dhegdheer waxaa loo adeegsadaa in carruurta lagu "cabsiiyo" si ay uga haraan dhaqammada xun-xun. Waalidiintu carruurta yaryar bay uga digaan: Keligaa dibadda ha aadin ama Dhegdheer baa ku qaadan doonta. Sheekada Dhegdheer waxaa lagu fasiran karaa inaan magan u nahay awooddha dhabta ah oo kala wadda dunida, mar walbana garsoorka leh.

Dhegdheer waxaa sheekadeeda gobollada Soomaalida looga sheekeeyaa siyaabo kala duwan, tan ugu caansanna waa mida Dhegdheer ay gabadheedu aakhirka dilayso. Sida halkan looga soo tebinayo, Dhegdheer dhimashadeeda waxaa sabab looga dhiigay musiibo xagga rabbi looga soo diray.
A story, a story, it's time for a story...
Sheekoo, sheeko, sheeko xariira...
Once upon a time, a fierce cannibal named Dhegdheer roamed the Hargega Valley in Somalia. Her horrific ways cursed a land once green and lush, turning it into a desert, a crumbling dust. The animals grew thin and the rain went away for a very long time.
Waa baa, waxaa jiri jirtay, dad qalato la oran jiray Dhiegdeere oo ku noolayd agagaarka Boholaha Xargega ee dalka Soomaaliya. Caadooyinkeedii xumaa waxay boor iyo habaas ka kiciyeen dhul markii sii hore ahaa doog iyo barwaqo. Muddo aad u dheer baa roobkii ka guuray degmadii xoolihiina waa macaluuleen.
Dhegdheer was as strong and swift as the wind. She had an unusually long pointy ear with the strange power to hear even the gait of camels a half-day’s journey away.
Dhegdheer aad bay u xoog weynayd una lali jirtay sida dabaysa xagaa. Waxay lahayd Dheg si layaab leh u dheer, lehna awooddha cajiibka ah oo ay ku maqasho shanqarta saanta geel daaqaya meel jirta maalin barkeed.
One morning, Dhegdheer set out on her daily hunt for her next meal. She rummaged anxiously through the steep hills, a hatchet in her hand and an empty sack on her back to bring home her finds.

“I shall come upon a young woman weaving mats under a thorn tree,” she told herself. But throughout the dusty roads, Dhegdheer found no prey. Hungry and frustrated, she went home.
Subax bay Dhegdheer u dhaqaaqday ugaarsigii cunto maalmeedkeeda. Waxay sii dhexqaaday buuraha iyada oo gacantana ku sidata gudin, dhabarkana jawaan maran oo ah kay ku soo qaadan lahayd qofka ay dilato.

"Waa in aan ku soo baxaa gabar yar oo geed galool ah oo qodax leh hoostiisa raro ku samaysneysa," Dhegdheer baa iskula hadashay. Balse waxay sii dhexqaado jidka siigada lahaa, maalintaa waxba gacanta kuma dhigin. Iyadii oo gaajo iyo jaho wareer isku darsantay bay ku laabatay gurigeedii.
Dhegdheer vowed to never return home empty-handed again. “I will use my special powers to trap lonely travelers,” decided Dhegdheer. “Don’t tired souls need some water and a moment’s rest? I shall be lucky.”

“Gather up some wood, grass, and lots of sticks,” she ordered her only daughter.

Then she lashed the grasses, wood, and sticks together, building a row of fake huts next to her old dwelling. After that, she ordered Bowdheer, a large vessel in which she stored human flesh, to whistle if anyone touched it. “I shall hear you wherever I might be,” she said.

Exhausted, Dhegdheer drifted off to sleep, still hungry.

“Soo gur qoryo iyo caws,” bay ku amartay gabadheedii, kaligeed ay lahayd.

Dabadeedna qoryihii iyo cawskii waxay ka dhistay aqallo dhowr ah oo dhinaca ku haya aqalkii Dhedheer. Kadibna, haantii Bowdheer oo ay hilibka dadka ku guran jirtay bay ku amartay in ay shanqar aad u dheer samayso haddii la isku dayo in la furo.
“Waan kaa maqli doonaa meel walba oo aan joogo,” bay tiri.
Daal dartii hurdaa la tagtay iyadii oo wali gaajaysan.
That evening, along the dirt road near Dhégdheer’s home came a grieving widow with a chubby child on her back. The woman was determined not to rest until she returned to her family’s home. But she and her child were hungry and tired. They were thrilled to come upon the huts.

“Please give us some water so you might someday be spared of thirst?” the woman asked in the traditional way.

Dhégdheer’s daughter quickly responded to the woman. “Here, drink this,” she said, handing the woman a cup.


“Gabadhooy, na waraabi, in aan Ilaahay ku oomin?” ayey haweenaydii u wediisatey gabadhii Dhégdheer siduu dhaqanku ahaa.

Gabadhu si dhaqso ah bay ugu jawaabtay. “Hooya biyahan cabba,” iyada oo u dhiibaysa aagaan biyo ah.
“I will find you something to eat but I must warn you. My mother is Dhegdheer . . . I fear she will harm you if she awakens,” whispered Dhegdheer’s daughter. “You must hide until she leaves for hunting tomorrow, and then get away fast.”

Trembling, the woman and her child hid inside a rolled grass mat lying behind a hut. Dhegdheer’s daughter tried to sneak them a piece of dried meat. As she did so, she bumped the lid of Bowdheer.

A piercing whistle broke through the calm night. “Whoooo . . . whoooooo . . .”
Waxayna raacisay, "Waan idin marti gelin lahaa, oo idin haraad iyo gaajo tiri lahaa, laakiin gurigaad timaadeen waa kii Dhieg dheer." Iyada oo hadalka hoos u dhigaysa ayey uga digtay, "Ogsoonadaa, hooqayad Dhieg dheer in aydaan ka badbaadi doonin haddii hurdaa ka toostoo. Waa in aad ka dhuumataan ilaa ay ugaarsi u jarmaadayso, dabadeedna si dhaqso ah aad naftiina u badbaadisaan," ayey tiri.


Qaylo dhego jabis ah ayaa hal mara xasiloonidii habeenka burburisay. "Bow... Bow..."
Dhegdheer leaped out of her sleep. “Oh! My Alla! Who touched my vessel?”

“I tried to find my dried goat meat inside the clay jar but I mistakenly bumped Bowdheer,” said Dhegdheer’s daughter.

“You are lying to me!” Dhegdheer said. She started to sniff and snuffle. “Is it a fat little boy I smell?”

“Do you smell the creases of my own fat, mother?” asked the daughter.

“I smell the flesh of a young woman,” Dhegdheer yelled, growing impatient and angry.

“It’s my own flesh, mother,” replied her daughter.
Dhegdheer hurddaadii ayey ka toostay!
"Alla! Yaa taabtay haantayda?"

"Hooyo aniga oo hilib solay ah ka baaranaya saabka dusha suran, ayaan ku dhacay Bowdheer," bay tiri gabadhii.

"Been baad ii sheegi!" Dhegdheer baa tiri. Waxay bilowday inay sanka la raacdo hadba jaho. "Waxa ii soo uraya ma wiil yaroo buuran baa?"

"Ma baruurtaydaa hooyo waxa kuu uray?" ayey gabadhii ku jawaabtey.

"Waxa ii uraya hilbo gabar yar," ayey si cadho ah u tiri Dhegdheer.

"Hooyo waa jidhkaayga," ayey mar kale, gabadhii Dhegdheer ku celisey.
Madly, Dhugdheer kept sniffing through each hut. Under the mat, the woman and her child heard the shouting and the sniffing. They knew they would soon be discovered. Dhugdheer’s daughter ran to the edge of their mat and whispered, “Run!”
Lyadii oo aan lahayn meel la qabto ayey hadba jiho sanka la raacday, tuhunnsana in ay gabadhu wax qarinayso.

The woman stood with the child on her back. Trembling with fear, she could hardly move.

She called upon Allah, “May we be spared from the troubles of Dhegdheer.” With her prayers, came the courage to run.

She knew Dhegdheer could run as swiftly as the wind.

Haweenaydii sare ayay isu taagtay, ilmihii oo weli dhabarkeeda saaran, baqdin ayayse la dhaqaaqi waydey.

“Ilaahow naga badbaadi belada Dhegdheer,” ducadeedii waxaa loogu bedalay karti ay ku oroddo.

Haweenaydu waa ay ogsoonayd in Dhegdheer dabaysha la orod tahay.
Dheggheeer will eat us alive, for no one can outrun Dheggheeer, thought the woman. But she kept running and she kept praying. Faster and faster she ran, until she came to the edge of the Hargega Valley. “An enemy is after us, make way for us to escape,” she cried to the valley.

The valley spoke: “If you are free of sin, I will allow you to cross. If not, I will eat you up.” Because of their innocence, the woman and her child crossed the valley safely.

“Haddii aadan dembi isku ogeyn, waan oggolahay inaad i gudubto, haddii kalese waan ku liqayaa,” ayaa waxaa ugu jawaabey toggii. Daacadnimadeedii awgeed, haweeni iyo ilmihiis si nabad ah ayey ku dhaafeen Boholaha Xargega.
Dhegdheer stood on the edge of the valley, staring at the woman and the flesh of the little boy far on the other side. Restless and crying, she chanted her mournful song:

“Oh, Hargega Valley,
It traps the wings of one flying,
It closes the way of a fast-running man,
Look at the plumpness of the woman,
Look, look at the little boy she is carrying.”

Then she made a desperate request of the valley:
“Make way for me too, for I am after a chubby child and a woman who have tantalized my appetite.”

Dhegdheer shallaay ayay isla dul taagtay toggi, iyada oo ku sii dhaygagsan haweenaydiig iyo wiilka cayilkiisa. Markaasay ku barooratay heesteedii shallaayga ahayd:

“Cakuye Boholaha Xargega,
Nin Duulaayeey Dabraan,
Nin xiiimaayeey Xiraan,
Bal naagttaa barida daya,
Bal wiilkay sidato daya,
Bal bowdada cadaanta daya,
Bal buluq buluqdeeda daya.”

Kadibna, Dhegdheer waxay dhiibatey codsi quusasha ah:

“Anna jid ii fur waxaan eryanayaa cunug yar oo buuran iyo hooyadiis oo gaajo igu kiciiyey,” ayey tiri.
“If you are free of sin, I will allow you to cross. If not, I will eat you up,” responded the valley.

Dhegdheer attempted to cross, but as soon as she set foot at the edge, her flood of sins filled the valley and she was swallowed up.

“Haddaadan dembi isku ogeyn, waan oggolahay inaad i gudubto haddii kalese waan ku liqayaa,” ayuu ugu jawaabey.

Markay cagta saartay qarka oo ay rabto inay ka tallowdo Boholaha Xargega, baa hal mar toggii waxaa harqiyeys sharkii iyo dembiyaday hore u kasbatay. Meeshaas ayaa Dhegdheer toggii ku liqay.
At last! The rainfall returned to Hargega. The thorn bushes and tall grasses grew green and lush. The animals grew plump and produced ample milk.

Chanting and singing filled the air:
“Dhegdheer is dead! The land has peace.”
Ugu dambeynii Xargega roob baa ka da’ay! Dooggii baa is wada qabsaday. Xoolihii way cayileen waxayna yeesheen caano haqabtir leh.

Heeso iyo ciyaaro ayaa isu baxay:
“Dhegdheer dhimato! Dhulkii nabadeey.”
THE SOMALI BILINGUAL BOOK PROJECT reflects the Minnesota Humanities Commission’s commitment to promote and preserve heritage languages and increase English literacy skills of refugee and immigrant families. This collaborative project initially includes the publication of four bilingual children’s books for shared reading and a dual-language audio recording. A portion of proceeds from sales of the books will support ongoing projects of the Minnesota Humanities Commission’s Bilingual and Heritage Language Programs.

MARIAN (UBAH) A. HASSAN is a writer, journalist, and an educator. Marian’s love for stories started at an early age listening to relatives tell Somali tales. She lives with her family in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and is the author of a bilingual children’s book Bright Stars, Blue Sky.

BETSY BOWEN is the author-illustrator of several titles including Antler, Bear, Canoe: A Northwoods Alphabet Year. She has illustrated Shingebiss, an Ojibwe Legend, and The Troll with No Heart in His Body and Other Tales of Trolls. Her interest in folktales extends into puppetmaking and theater. She lives in Grand Marais, Minnesota.