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Flight from Freetown

by Helen Fallon

Alhaji asked if he could come with me.
He said he'd mind my mother's herd of goats
and study at my university.
I left him my radio and fifty leone notes.

Al Haji – he who makes the Haj - it means.
Five times a day, he bowed low in prayer,
asked God to grant his education dreams,
as muezzin's call echoed across still air.

I heard he joined the rebels, went to war,
attacked Freetown, torched houses to the ground,
scorched the earth his people nurtured,
always listening, alert for any sound.

I dream him still, tuned to the BBC,
Kalashnikov held tight against his knee.