

Chapter 8 OG Mbito

20 years dedicated to this office, and for what? With each passing year, Mbito saw fewer and fewer ships sail in. He passed time at his mahogany desk with a two-way radio and learned that textiles from Zambia were making good profits. He heard about Kenyan coffee right before he heard about Mujaheddin soldiers in Afghanistan. He heard that zombies in Malawi and Uganda were cracking people's heads open. Although he wanted to open the economy, he recognized that the conservative trade policy was keeping their assets safe.

Mbito had matured with his nation and was tied to it. He wasn't religious or cosmopolitan so his family values, ethics, and pride were with Tanzania. He was about to see his oldest child get married, and he expected a ten percent increase in exports if they lowered tariffs across the board by only three percent. He was free to voice how proud he was, even though nobody in power ever listened. Nonetheless, he said often that Tanzanian products needed sensible tariffs to encourage trade of the best that Africa had to offer.

He shuffled and straightened the items on his mahogany desk. He turned off the green lamp. The theme of the evening news relaxed him into his chair and he listened in the dark, dozing with the radio's soft hum.

After talks with liberal economists, President Nyerere has agreed to a 10% cut on coffee. Finance Minister Kighoma Malima has said that this measure has been taken to encourage trade. Depending on its effect, trade liberalization could continue...

A big grin grew on his face and he was about to bring his good mood to his wife. After the show, he got up to see that his whole family was asleep in bed but his wife was waiting awake, knitting by candlelight. She looked up and whispered "Dear, did you remember we're going to Banou's garden party on Saturday afternoon."

"Ah yes," his grin was inviting her to come into the living room.

She replied, "Come here baby, let me help you with your collar." He stood in his slippers at the side of the bed allowing the tight clasp on his white collar to loosen. It was filthy with yellow sweat.

"Thank you dear,"

"Let's go to the sitting room so I can rub your back."

Suddenly the phone rang. "Just a moment honey." Mbito hummed as he shuffled to his study. It was the governor of the Iringa region, "Bad news," he delivered. Bandits had raided Kidugula village in the mountains. They kidnapped girls and killed at least a dozen others. They stole everything. Survivors have no money, food or anything to trade. "The food bank can help a little but surely we can't meet needs nonetheless quotas. There is no coffee, no tobacco, no gold neither. And there is famine. We cannot even reach the villages or build roads."

The news weighed on Mbito like a cannonball. A few more hairs turned grey. He needed to take action *and* call others to fly.

Many young officers were certainly waiting for an opportunity to defend their country. He stopped short and imagined the bird's eye view of the harbor, filled with ships. Then he thought about

the heartland, in fear of a famine. This was his hand to play so he thought that they'd been too lenient. Trusting the word of the other leaders that there would be border control. The National Guard would be sharper if there weren't so many lazy bureaucrats in the major cities. He had a feeling he would be stymied by Jonathan. He'd become a military general, and Mbiti became a bureaucrat as teenagers they used to prowl the streets together. He asked the Governor of Iringa

“What about the national guard? Is there a reserve in Iringa?” after a long pause.

“No, and no naval presence in the lake either. What about local ferries? Tourists operations. The lake is wide, but it can be crossed. They brought the vehicles from across Lake Malawi. The lake across from the mountain has always protected us by keeping extreme weather away but it was invaded and with what brutality. The villagers took up spears and darts. They fought bravely as the bandits drove in with machetes and guns.”

“What did they take?”

“Many young women and girls, lots of coffee too. Most of the villages in the East farm at least a little coffee.

Mbiti looked at his checkbook. “This calls for action. I will do everything I can. For now, get the national guard to search the Livingstone mountains. I'll call back in the evening.”

He closed the line with his finger and dialed General Jonathon.

“We have a dire situation in the Livingstone mountains.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Sir, in the Kipengeres, there are savage bandits that—”

“Yes we're aware. At the moment our strategy is strictly defensive.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“There isn't a feasible point of attack until we know where they'll strike next. We've sent soldiers to some villages.”

“Are they searching for these bandits? Can we contact President Banda?”

“Banda is not our ally in this fight,” he sighed. “He's dissolved the Malawian cabinet. War is just one provocation away. If we send troops across the lake, they will certainly be attacked. We're protecting our villages.

“All of them? Sir, the bandits may grow into a garrison. They have military vehicles and heavy weapons. If there's no cabinet, they're probably acting independently with no recourse from Banda or Nyerere.”

“How dare you use their names together like that!”

“Both are able to stop this, but neither will and perhaps for the same reason. I suggest we cut off the serpent's head before it grows another.”

“Any military crossing into Malawi is off the table.”

“Sir, am I to understand that we're unwilling to respond to a foreign invasion?”

“We can't risk getting involved in endless escalation! Goddamn it Mbiti, you're a port officer, why am I having this discussion with you?” It clicked to a dead air. Mbiti slid his finger into the slot, and rapidly flicked 1,1,1 for Mr. Ali Kighoma Malima, treasurer.

“Sir, allow me to be brief. Rogue soldiers from Malawi are raiding our villages. I've just had a call from the Governor of Iringa, and then a conversation with General Jonathon. We won't send our military. It's a disgrace! We must send food aid immediately.”

“We will send food and medical supplies. What village?”

“Kidugula. Just send fifty sacks of dry food to Iringa, they'll send it to the right place.”

“The situation is indeed dire if the impetus is on us bureaucrats.” said Mr. Malima sharply, “Damn it! General Jonathon is acting like a little girl. He leads a military that could conquer Malawi in two weeks! These bandits are an annoying little mosquito sucking away but our hand cannot slap!” Papers rustled over the line, “They'll eat, but if these bandits aren't stopped we won't need to send food for much longer. This nightmare needs to end.” Kighoma was bold to say, “Keep this quiet for now but we need mercenaries. Do you know of any?”

“I might, but... can we work with Jonathan?”

“Maybe, but I fear there is a powerful foreign agent selling our girls. Jonathan would know nothing about that. I'll contact the Central Intelligence Agency”

“Well sir, let's try to narrow their location down, and ascertain their size and fighting strength. As for the mercenaries, they'll need access to this information and at least half a million dollars under the table. Is this available?”

“I can't say at this point but I will call you tomorrow,” Mr. Kighoma Malima hung up his phone, said his prayers, fell asleep and out of our story.

Chapter 9 Friends' enemies

“Old friend, it's a blessing.”

“Mbito, you've grown sideways!”

Mbito laughed, “Is that another brass ring in your ear you old pirate. What do you drink?” and embraced him.

“Coffee please.”

Mbito paused and slumped like a wind up toy. He straightened himself back up in his chair, and smiled. He was pensive. He rebuked himself for the offer he was about to make. Simbat was no mercenary. If Mbito had underestimated these bandits him and his crew would all die. Doubts swirled in. Not so long ago Tanzania had slaughtered Arabs. Now, they're asking them to risk their lives for a few hundred thousand dollars.

“Yes... coffee. Have pirates ever tried to take goods from your ship?” relying heavily on his brass tacked armrest, Mbito straightened himself, reached for the phone and called for coffee. Simbat was glancing around the familiar office. Wide-open shutters splattered sunlight across a large, ornate world map inside a blue, orange and red frame. A portrait of Nyerere hung behind the heavy wooden desk.

“I, Simbat have had many encounters at sea with pirate ships, and I am comforted to say now

that the only thing that's changed is they're called US ships now, and they wave a busy flag all red and blue. They're all robbers and a few are bloodthirsty. The Sultanate of Oman is pleased. You must be proud! Your life's work is good for Tanzania and world."

"There's a problem. As we opening up our gates to the world, we are invaded from within. Simbat my friend, I fear coffee prices will be double this week."

"Prices? What, invasion?"

"Yes Simbat, the inner borders are plagued with bandits and we watch these mosquitoes suck our blood. They prowl our farmlands and villages, killing, raping and stealing. West of Selous, the land is rich, but the people are poor and cannot defend themselves."

"Can't your military bring them to justice?"

"Not without risking war against Malawi. I think they are connected to the coup who tried to assassinate President Banda. They might have allies within our borders now."

"They're from Malawi? Can Banda help? This is his problem too?"

"Banda thinks he's impeccable but he knows his days are numbered so he's ignoring the countryside but if we notify him of this, than he will say that the bandits are waylaying him and that came from Tanzania." Mbito loaded tobacco into an ivory pipe and lit a match, "They always steal coffee, gold," he held the flame to the bowl and puffed. The rising smoke clouded his face, "and girls."

"Girls? Listen. A guy called Abdullah Zait al Muqrin offered me a lot of money recently. He said he said it was just a trip across the Indian Ocean. I'm sure he's smuggling all sorts of people."

"Where does he set off?"

"I don't know, probably some sandy beach on the horn. I refused his offer."

"And you think he's shipping soldiers to Afghanistan?"

"Maybe smuggling more souls than soldiers."

"Brides? Would you be willing to fight for them?"

"How many bandits? How well armed?"

"Fifteen bandits at village raids. You probably had better weapons than their guns, blades and grenades."

"I've learned this lesson already. I'm not going to sit like a duck against the wrong kind of attack. How much is this worth?"

Mbito wrote \$500,000 on a slip of paper and slid it to Simbat.

"In gold, plus expenses for ammunition and repairs to our vehicles."

"I'll call the treasury, I don't think there are that many gold bars left."

"Gold should be in the hands of the people who spend it, not banks. Alright, I have to recruit an army. My helicopter can host three pregnant hippos, and like them, it's deceptively fast and dangerous. I'll do it for as much gold as you can, and the remaining cash comes with twenty percent."

"Ten."

"..."

"Alright fifteen. I never should have taken you under my wing, you mobster!" he larked.

“My sailors may accept, but we're not all soldiers. So, if I can recruit twenty mercenaries, we will fight.”

“Ok my friend.” They shook hands, “I understand you're docking in Dar es Salaam tomorrow. I will call your radio in the morning.” Simbat left O.G. Mbiti's office with a tentative agreement and walked down three flights of stairs and through the metal gates of the port onto Zanzibar's oldest settlement. To noone at all, he told a crass joke, “Greetings Stone Town, Father Muscat orders early season peaches, and a eunuch to guard them.” Along the shoreline, young boys swam. He struggled for a moment to remember the way to the bazaar. He walked past the big tree and stopped for a cup of tea from a street vendor. The sea was still rolling in his ear. Like always, he was thinking about whores as he walked steadily towards the market square. When he arrived, he paused at the edge of the wide lot, leaned his broad shoulders against a wall in a shady spot and glanced at the vendors. Some men working a produce stand recognized him and gestured him over. Simbat gave them an ear.

“Oooh ha! Sailor from Arabia, come here. Do you drink tea? Keanjaho! Tea!”

A hurried shopper in a business suit cut in front of him, “I'd like twelve plantains, two pineapples, twenty mangos and a pile of peppers.” The produce is proudly pushed from the cart into bags. Whether claims are overrated or these actually are the sweetest mangoes in Tanzania, their stand has been King of the Bazaar for three seasons. Okay, I'll admit it. They're good mangoes.

Simbat asks Keanjaho if green coffee is available.

“Is there any coffee for Simbat?” shouts Keanjaho. The workers at the stand buzz with noise and motion. “I wish I had a coffee, I've been working since last night.” “No coffee. This bazaar has no coffee.” “I don't give a damn about a bean.” “I bet those gangsters at the tea shop have some coffee or some idea about-” “Hey!” interrupted, “I hear the Chinese Bazaar has some coffee too, maybe can-” “Maybe can call out plantain! pineapples! peppers! or shut the hell up,”

“Stick around this bazaar for a while, Simbat.”

“No no, come back in an hour and we're gonna cook some rice.”

“Ahh you with your Chinese maggot grain.”

“What should we eat than? Grasshoppers nasi?”

Simbat slowly took out his coin purse, “Thanks for the tea, how much do I owe you?”

“Two hundred and twenty shillings.”

“Here, take all of this,” he slapped a load of coins. Keanjaho grasped it kindly, “And a lot more if you can find me 50 sacks of green coffee.”

In the seasons at port Simbat packed light, rented accommodation and led an active life. He'd climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro, stayed as a guest at the Sultan of Brunui, and worked as a guard at the Omani Embassy in London. On shoreleave his crew get their bonuss and they return on time. Last winter in Australia, his mate Takrit came running a yard's length ahead of a Maori woman. She ripped his shirt off as he jumped on the ship at the last second. As they drifted apart she shouted curses at him.

Simbat often visited fortune tellers but never took fate for granted. He was superstitious but his intention tempered his intuition to write his own story. The concurrent events of his arrival at OG Mbiti's port didn't escape him. He was a free captain and it would be ethical and profitable to defend the innocent. If he'd known however, what I know—what would intertwine his story line with those underfoot bandits and brokers who trample to take barely halal wives—he probably wouldn't have

done anything different. Such is the nature of opportunism.

Chapter 10 *C'est la vie*

Hayat is beholden to mourn her martyred husband for four months and ten days, but no wreaths or garlands of white carnations deliquesce in her chamber. She sits on a white couch under a black flag and looks at a laptop shining on her coffee table. She reads a calligraphic image, *Without a doubt Amedy is joining Merciful Allah. Inshallah you join your family in the Caliphate soon.*

Amedy face appears as a reflection in the laptop, from the dark corner of the image. He held high his brow but his jaw was clenched, just like he was when they rode the ferris wheel. Hayat feels a knot in her stomach. The Caliphate needs her stories and reciprocates by stoking her vanity. She will exemplify the wife with confidence which she accepts between love and death. Clicking the link will inspire women across the Islamic world. She will enter a life of celebrity reserved in Paris for whores and politicians. The luxury will transform her nature from rebellious to feminine, and prevent her from joining her husband in paradise too soon.

Hayat is to travel to Rakka. She will be happier there, and certainly safer. A transport across Europe and Anatolia and into Sham has been planned. She has comforted and aided her husband Amedy in his self-sacrificing jihad, and thus fulfilled her spousal duties. She has no doubt that strangers in the Caliphate will praise her *sunah*. Parisians oppress us so Allah is bringing his servants home. What glorious days!

Hayat daydreams. She sits in a palanquin, high above the desert. Long winds cast the curtains open to expose visions of golden sands like ocean swells. Slaves effortlessly loft her feathery frame high above the desert as she reclines in abundance, snacking on fruit and nuts. Etched on a magical silver tray is a grid for her to arrange various candies, nuts, gems, scarabs and ankhs in a solitaire game. To her delight, groupings of occult symbols disappear and gold coins materialize and rotate while more gems fill in to renew the game. It's a daydream for an idle mind whose cellphone has been ditched.

Her husband is in heaven and soon she travels to the Caliphate. *Muhammad Messenger of Allah* in white calligraphy on black velvet hangs behind the couch she sits on. Her thoughts oscillate between revenge fantasies, her martyred husband and being carried though the desert atop her lofted litter. A packed bag sits near the door. Paris, the city she was born to, educated in, and where she developed her radical bent, will be a broken memory, as quickly forgotten as an Algerian child abandoned to Western Education. She yearns to remove herself, to renew herself. Filthy people will harass her no longer for her purity, abuse her no longer for her righteousness, threaten her no longer for her faith. The "friends" she made here, even the Muslims would send her back to the police. Not again, never again to sit under bright lights and suffer the inquisitions of infidels. Today, friends will come to drive her to a righteous, new nation. Still, she worries that the escort of strangers are not friends, and that she's already been sold out. Maybe these "friends" will bring her to Paris police, Interpol, or angry mobs of Jews.

To Paris, he is a terrorist jihadi but she knows why he shot the police and ran into the market. But those memories are rotten. Best to leave then in this dump of a city.

The doorbell rings.

She inquires who?

"Friends"

She opens the door and sees three men but her gaze is tailored with precision to Rabi. She knows his name yet feigns a maiden greeting. Clearly the leader she shall address him first. He's the handsomest man she's ever seen. She imagines herself on a horse holding him tightly from behind, her heavy breasts pressed against his taut and rippling back as he swings a sword against the ocean of soldiers in white tunics with red crosses.

She feels self-consciousness, panics. Have they greeted her? They're silent now, looking blankly. Allah, she swoons. Her consciousness fades. As her body slumps into Rabi's arms, she catches a glimpse of Abu's cloudy globes loosely set, they fall out sideways, pupils jousting, separating and turning back together like two fighters.

Horrors, demons and genies close in. Hayat's world is crashing down. Surely a new world is being raised, miles away. As the widow of a martyr, she will be courted to choose a new husband.

"Why'd she pass out?"

"I'm a touch her titty," Tola reaches out fecklessly but is slapped away by Rabi, who has pushed the limp girl to Abu.

"Uncle Abdul wants her treated with respect, so be a man. And don't ask any fucking questions when she wakes up. Abu, bring her in and put her on the couch."

The house smells like old tea. Tola picks up a bright laptop with an calligraphic e-card, "I can't read this. Rabi, you know Arabic right? What's it say?"

Rabi snatches it, "It's an email." He begins to read and understand the heavy language used for religious rites, Glorious martyr... *Rahimalu Allah...* in heaven. He silently curses Abdul.

"It's a funeral card."

"What's it say?"

"It says fuck your mother, I don't know. This is Algerian. I speak Iraqi."

Tola checks her heartbeat and they go out front to smoke, first Abu and Tola, and when Rabi comes out they hound,

"This bint got any family here?"

"Why are we taking her?"

"Why'd she faint?"

"Who the fuck is she?" His questions hang in the air. The wind fails to rustle anyone's hair. A few pedestrians pass with grocery bags in hand. Some give quick, hostile glances but many more are canny and unperturbed. Her building housed concubines of French monarchist soldiers with revolutionaries. It was accustomed to all sorts of clashes.

The front door opens and the woman, wearing a headscarf now, addresses them, "Are you Abdul's friends?"

"Abdul is my uncle," Rabi responds genuinely. "We're here to transport you."

She says nothing and motions for them to enter. Without making eye contact she passes through the sitting room into the kitchen and closes the door behind her. The electric kettle bubbles and clicks off. She returns with a pot of tea, a bowl of sugar cubes, 6 tulip shaped tea glasses and asks in a distinct French accent, "did you have a good drive to Paris?"

"Yeah"

"Sure"

"Our road was clear. Abdul has planned our it under good weather."

"Yes." she laughs. "When he introduced me to Amedy, we were in a spring meadow full of flowers in bloom," she muses. "Amedy threw them into the air and proposed immediately."

She takes a photo album and starts flipping through the pages. They're mostly wedding photos of Hayat and Amedy with other couples. "This is the day." In the photo she's sitting between and Amedy and Abdul are holding her wrists.

"I don't know what Abdul has told you of my husband." She bites her lip. "He gave me a good life and all you see here was paid for by his hard work and sacrifice."

"We don't know anything actually. What did he do?"

Hayat hesitates. She exhales sharply and loses control of her dark eyes as if she's going to faint again but she inhales slowly and calms herself. "He worked in an auto factory," she says in a measured tone without looking up.

Tola flips the page and sees a photo of Hayat in swimwear next to a black man of the same height on a beach, her flower print bikini too small and her breasts too large for traditional modesty. She snatches the album and gives him a dirty look. Tola can't hold back a raised eyebrow.

"We fell in love at a very young age. He was very calm and motivated. We learned about Islam together and," she sobs and reaches for a tissue but finds the box empty, "I don't know how I can live without him."

Rabi quickly takes his handkerchief from his jacket pocket and hands it to her in his most gentlemanly display. "It's alright" he says, "you're young and beautiful and there's a new life for you."

"You think?" she raises an eye slightly.

"I know. Big things are being prepared for you. Just wait and see." The men stand up. "Ready to go?"

"I don't feel ready. I've packed a bag but I don't have the proper clothing. When we're in Milan, could you take me shopping?"

"Of course, of course," through his teeth, "Abdul is my beloved uncle and you're like family now."

"Thank you."

Chapter 11 La Fistinière

Southeast from Paris, medieval towns disappear forever as Hayat gazes out the window, holding a pin in her forefingers. Her heart aches. She holds onto glimpses of estates of wood and stone, Rustic signs with family crests. She had hoped that she could spend at least one weekend on a vineyard, but the few times she'd left Paris, she found rural France revolting. She allowed herself one more daydream about riding a bicycle between lines of poplar trees to meet a man with eyes like emeralds, who drops

his basket of grapes to make love to her. As her thought pulse, she eyes the large stranger in a leather jacket, sleeping next to her. She slowly reaches for the door handle and lifts it, a millimeter at a time, feeling for the moment it catches the latch and she's only a small thrust away from rolling out. She closes her eyes and pulls. It's locked. There's comfort in the knowledge that her Islamic State's war is in Arabia and France and that perhaps, one day, she can return as a martyr widow. She recalls the name of the town, *Châtillon*, and wistfully stores it in her memory as a crystal snow begins to fall.

Hayat doesn't notice that they haven't been on the highway for nearly an hour. Nor does she notice Tola's discomfort about the detour. Rabi checks his GPS and makes turns alongside picket fences. Tola sings and blathers like a radio dialed across frequencies and glances back at Abu, who stays silent.

"I'm hungry," barks Rabi, "Let's get a steak here eh? I'm buying everyone a steak. Come on Abu, it'll make you feel better about Duygu."

Abu and Tola look surprised. "What's this than? Are you cajoling for something?"

"He buttering us up to some Italian strip club tonight and wants me to flash my credit card cause his is likely fucked," jokes Tola.

Hayat pulls another pin from her veil and rolls down the window. She leans towards the oncoming pressure, her head towards the open window. Fat sheep stare dumbly as they pass and Hayat concentrates on the scene, makes a mental picture. She withdraws, recovers and mutters "*Astthagfiru Lillah*". They turn a corner onto a driveway bordered by two rows of blooming rosebushes. A wooden sign with *La Fistinière* swings overhead.

"Here we are," says Rabi, "A continental steakhouse. If this place can't serve a nice slab of beef, we'll go to McDonalds."

"This doesn't even look like a restaurant, more like a bed and breakfast."

"Listen, this is a ground mission, so let's get down to ground round." Rabi pulls into a gravel lot between a white and black Bugatti and a grand, cobblestone barn with thin rectangular windows, red shutters and a small door. "Most of the time these B 'n B's put their kitchen in the barn, you know to keep the rooms from stinking like swine. C'mon let's take a look." Tola's paralytic but gets out behind Abu and Hayat. Rabi stifles a grimace. Abu opens the door to reveal a pornographic scene.

A plunging forearm up to the elbow into a man's anus is attached to a short, bald man whose arm is, to the elbow, up inside a third man whimpering like an abandoned kitten. Another grunting duo of ebony and ivory fist fuck each other into a yin-yang.

Some of the man-puppets look back, perched on haybales, with welcoming glances. Between stun, shock, pleasure and pain Hayat screams and a half dozen men clench. Rabi covers her eyes with one hand and wraps the other around her waist, pulling her back out the door. Abu and Tola slap each other silly, spit and hurl. Hayat's too stupefied to look and holds Rabi's hands as he steers her back to the car and whispers Arabic curses in her ear. By the time the barnstormers reach the car it's too late for a well-dressed man has exited the homestead with a baseball bat in hand to catch a taillight as they peel out.

"How horrible," says Rabi, from inside the considerable space in the climate controlled Land Rover as it speeds down the road. "The French make their faggotty business in plain view. Let's go to fucking McDonalds."

"Cheap bastard," mutters Abu under his breath.

A panic is accumulating. The task of driving across Europe is tense and awkward with cross purposes. Rabi's eye meets Hayat's in the rearview and quickly withdraws to the road. The honored guest's far-off attention is accessed only by chivalry. He anticipates and yields to her turns of whim, opening and closing the window, changing music, offering her snacks and drinks with deference before she is able to voice her desires. Tola and Abu suspiciously share recognizant glances activating a reasonable respect. With every dragging second, the atmosphere presents itself less and less appropriate to conversation.

They drive through Alpine roads and tunnels into Northern Italy's urban zone with relief. The darkness has long fallen yet the awkwardness stinks like a wet dog. The first leg of the long journey ends on a wide avenue. They step into the cold, dry air outside the American Hotel where they're booked two rooms for the night. Hayat's luggage and they squeeze into the elevator and ride to the tenth floor. They reach the lobby with a window open. The desk clerk looks up from her computer and takes off her headphones to greet them.

"Hello, we have a reservation. Two suites."

"Yes sir, welcome. Just a moment please." She clicks here mouse. "May I take your ID please" While lazily scanning passport, she summons a porter. Hayat's sitting down looking at her palms. Rabi looks up at the television the moment it identifies Amedy Coulibaly, the man from Hayat's photo album *morto*. The porter looks at her ID *Hayat Coulibaly*. Abu and Tola see the TV too but aren't sure if the picture is the same woman. The receptionist hands back their passports. He's watching the screen when the graphic flips to an another terror alert in the North of France and images of two men, Said and Cherif Kouachi, *a piede libero*.

A moment later, a porter greets the travelers. He steps to grab Hayat's luggage, but Rabi blocks his advance with a graceless and menacing mien, genuflecting the bellhop towards the elevator. With his most alien courtesy, the porter bows slightly and says "follow me," and than something in Italian back to the clerk. They walk past the thick purple Venician wallpaper to room 711. The bellhop opens it, hands the key to Rabi, and waits beside the door.

"Is it suitable?" Rabi asks Hayat. She takes a long look without stepping past the threshold. Her room is large and full of heavy furniture. It has an ornate windowsill looking over a courtyard and a basin raised up a step with an oval mattress fit for a captive princess.

"It is," she takes the key and slams the door.

They get outside and start to gallivant, full of crude and childish energy. After talking hard and fast about nothing, Tola looks to Rabi and says, "You're certifiably mental, you know that?I suppose you brought us to the French fudgepackers for a bit of entertainment than, wasn't it?"

"Ghastly thoughts," responds Rabi, "you think it's jokes?" Rabi smokes and offers the pack around but Tola and Abu wave it away, "Fun and games?"

"So," Abu mediates, "I figure, whoever's mash man, bitch, whatever, let's get the pecking order sorted. Rabi, you're the main man and we're following, but these underhand side missions aren't fostering any kind of trust. So, if you've got any more tricks up your sleeve, turn em out." Abu whips his hands down with palms up, "alright?"

"Alright." Rabi takes long slow drag on his cigarette and starts a slow, grey exhalation. "The mission operative—and what we're being paid for—is more than a simple drive." Abu closes his hands.

"I haven't put my finger on it yet but, think of Hayat as a princess and we're her royal guard. She's going to use her voice. The French have treated Muslims unfairly . They start wars in our nations, then invade in set off everybody's guns, then they bomb whoever's left. The rest of them are refugees and they let some of come but insist we abandon our faith. It's fucking disgusting, even moreso than London. Paris is target number one. Now it has its spokeswoman. When she gets to Rakka she'll be a celebrity. Magazines, radio and news shows want to interview her but she's likely to have some nostalgia right? European dreams? So we just get that shit out of the way. Show her this *fahishah* and how dirty France really is. Get it?"

"Yeah I got it," barks Tola, "We leave the English for the Day of Resurrection. Fuck the gold though, what if I turn around right now? I'll take that pack of speed home and sling it to ravers. What then miser? Liar in the habit of abusing people" His tense shoulders and hot head are leading forward aggressively.

In a fluid motion Rabi breaks Tola's focus by flicking his cigarette into his face, disrupts his forwards stance with an elbow strike to the chin and pins him against the building with a hard forearm to the neck. He takes body blows with a tense abdomen and distilled rage.

"Since the bullet slipped from the gun, you've got nothing left to lose, but so much to gain."

Abu backs him off, "walk it off son." Rabi defers to Abu and leaves silently. Tola's spitting and cursing but Abu gets his arm over his shoulder and walks him in the other direction.

Well into the night, the city wears a sinister mask. Within earshot and down a dimly lit avenue, a single cafe remains open. Outside, nimble youth sit on eachother's shoulders and writhe into inconceivable positions, shouting "*olé!*"

With a look, Tola suggests they go for a fight. Abu, senses they'd fight to jail, tuts his tongue and tips his head in the opposite direction towards Milano Centrale. They continue down dark, wide avenues towards the train station. Wide squares connect at informal angles.

Around a sharp block, they see Rabi approaching down a zig-zag-zig of intersections. He's locked on to them, taking one step per sidewalk square. He's apologetic before opening up. "You should know something about Hayat," he hesitates a moment. His face wobbles, "she is my cousin."

"Don't fuck with me," said Tola, " Know what? It doesn't fucking matter. Can't be assed. All in it together, pity I'm stuck in too, so let's just finish the drive and do the job and I'll fuck off back to London."

"Brother, do you think that you're still a free man of Europe? You might be able to board that plane in Istanbul but you won't make it out of London Heathrow. SO13'll be on your ass faster than you can say Allahu Akbar. Listen son, there's something else I didn't tell you. There are hundreds of people like us going to Syria but no one's coming back. They're all burning their passports. So get your story straight if you plan on it. Hayat's wanted by Interpol, no doubt of that. Didn't you figure she's involved in the Paris jihad? That's raging right now? Over those pigs that mocked our prophet in the magazine?"

Tola face is hard but he's listening.

Rabi continues, "Look, what you need to know is that my Uncle Abdul's arm is long enough to get us through Europe but that protection's gonna wear off faster than cocaine, and after that you're just another fiend. If there's any security footage of us leaving Hayat's apartment, or the roadways between here and there, than this is it hadji. One way trip. You're dead to the west, and the Caliphate is paradise."

"Anything else you haven't told us?"

"Well, you know about the kid in Sarajevo right?"

Chapter 12 Fortune Angel

Before we follow my grandson's gang any further, allow me a moment of clairvoyance. I am the roots of the tree that dropped him. I am a roommate of his head space. I'm the one in a million monkey that typed his story. Abu never met his grandmother, but I visit the dreams he ignores. Ah, dreams. I've dug so deep into dreams, that I've lost my agency. No one has any power in dreams. But it doesn't matter anyways. I spent all my power long ago to warn the white and brown people of Zanzibar to flee. Abu's father Simbat took my daughter to London and he left within a year. The nagging mother-in-law of his dreams was ignored. The blind youth scatter whatever seeds they have because anything that grows is good.

But this chapter is for the youth. When I was young, I learned to tell fortune. My mentor Busara and I looked into drunk-from cups and smelled destiny in the air. I spent more time with her than my parents. In lieu of an education, I walked all morning through Vuga, in the old Sultanate of Zanzibar where all our wealthy customers drank coffee and wondered about their love lives. Our parlor was some ancient closet with barely space to lie down but it was adjacent to a bustling tea shop. She'd hung a curtain from the ceiling to separate us from our guests. She said that we didn't need to look in order to see. Allah marks each soul with an indelible radiance that is seen with the mind, not the eyes. And that light of Allah rubs off on those we spend time with.

But when I was a teen, I gave in to the pagan arts. I asked Busara about resurrection and other black magic. Her disapproval wasn't enough. I opened pages to possession and married a traveling shaman. With this rebellion, I estranged Busara as well as my family. Disowned and renowned, I laughed, traveled, sought and cataloged the oldest stories in history. Words of God! some of them, but less perfect than the Noble Koran. We traveled in caravan to villages as far as Timbuctu and performed at harvest festivals. Fire was my art and I danced. I tempted the genies from Peristan. We traded scrolls with Zulu Chiefs and took rubbings from tablets in Kumasi. We studied ancient scripts from Nubia, Egypt and Assyria. The cryptographs of Shango burned my soul and I communicated through the medium of flare. I prayed with offerings of blood and wine and slept naked with the spirits, allowing them to possess me with wild emotions and the gifts of prophecy.

One evening, Jibrael descended on six wings of light. He said that my eternal life had been wasted in homage to the old gods. "Who was once considered the spirits of the earth are and always were the Djinn created from hellfire and destined to return there on the last day. What do you seek from this blasphemy? Are your visions worth your eternal soul?"

"I do not blaspheme against Allah," I was audacious enough to reply, "I worship Him as I praise all ye gods and goddesses. When I dance, I accept their will. Surely the one Allah is the One who enters."

"He is your creator, and he created those you worship of fire and deception. Your soul can be saved, but your sin can be atoned through reading and reciting the Koran. The Creator will consider

your *shirk* on the last day. Come now faithful into Allah's eternal graces."

Suddenly the wings exploded into light. I was drained and melted formless onto the stone floor. My husband came with his erection exposed as an animal, "Amesemi, you call me here. Be you priestess or goddess?"

I replied, "There's none by that name, leave me. I will come to you after I have rested." But he didn't leave. He raped me and left. I slept and the angel returned and cradled me. He wrapped his wings around me and hummed verses. I awoke, feeling as empty a forgotten oil lamp, and repented.

Henceforth I stopped dancing, became emotionally estranged from my cult and abandoned the ancient translations. Months passed and I found I was pregnant. I stayed at the next town that accepted me, Kidugula near Lake Malawi. Life became flat. Friendships unwound. Spirits abandoned my flesh.

I knew I couldn't return prodigiously to my family until I had atoned for my sins. A little stone man squat across the from me with his arms wrapped around his knees tightly, a trinket I had kept. His toucan beak rested quirkily on his knees. I took it. I held it low and stared forward. Only one prayer was in my head as I threw it down against the hard ground, "*Allahu Akbar; eshedu enla ilahe illallah.*" The last stone god of hundreds transformed into hundreds of pieces.

A young boy, ran inside, hearing the prayer. I could hear some older kids outside but he was hiding. I asked his name. He said *Ndoano*, Hook. He was tiny, gentle and an excellent fisherman for a 3-year old.

A little lifetime of journeys and spirits had made my young bones ache. When I stayed in Kidugula, my hands started moving slower and my body seemed to lose mass before it swelled up from the womb. I grew with children in this rainy mountain village. The locals were tolerant of me and we made friends with crafters, nurses and dogs. The orphan boy stayed with me and took a new name, Ignatio.

Late in my pregnancy, a former sister-wife came to us with the news that our husband, the man whom I once thought immortal, had died of dysentery. I must answer for the forbidden rite that we performed. She brought a lock of his hair and we salted it and buried it to block his soul from from possessing our daughter. Because it was past the day of ignorance, I know I must answer for it on my last day. Afterwards, I prayed for his soul and, by the grace of Allah and the village midwife, gave birth to Feride.

I nursed her and prayed five times daily with grief, shame and visions. I saw black men in the street breaking down doors and slaying brown men, a pervading curse. I prayed for an end to this phantasmagoria but my prayers were intercepted when demons came to collect unpaid debts. Allah is listening but I saw genies and afreets who told me that He wasn't.

I returned to Zanzibar with my bumbling toddler and her stoic older brother. She needed an education and despite the visions of violence, I followed my intuitions home. Busara was still working in Vuga but the neighborhood had become a powder keg of racial tensions. My parents were both sick with dementia. I reintroduced myself to them and cared for them until they died. At the beginning, they would play with Feride and were always surprised to learn that she existed. At the end they had no recognition of even me. Our bond was weak but I cried for them nonetheless, such is the nature of family.

I brought Feride and Ignatio to Busara. She said without looking up from her book, "Welcome Kahina, Ignatio and welcome to the world little Feride. Your coming is indeed good fortune." The tea shop's new owners, were the Bulsaras whose brash, young son Farrokh took a shine to Feride. He pinched her cheek and sang her funny songs. But the father, Jer was no longer interested in managing a

tea shop so he'd hired Busara to manage its salaries and property. In addition, Jer and Bomi Bulsara split property on the deed and bestowed a piece of property to Busara; 1 *seir* northeast of the old fort and 19 *qasbahs* from the sea, the 2 cubit space between the tea shop and the Hamamni gardens, is forthwith passed from Jer Bulsara to the ownership of Kim Busara. My mentor was at the age of grey hair and loose skin but she determined to empty and clean the kettles at the end of the day. Bomi traveled often to England and owned the rest of the tea shop but since he'd been to London, he drastically raised salaries. Jer was hands-off, "Just let Farokh perform his songs in the evenings."

The good times wouldn't last long though. Grim visions were revealed with increasing clarity. Busara, also plagued with visions of street violence said, "Kahina, if we're free, then humanity's bankrupt." Search the Koran to understand the visions through prayer and recitations. Allah is showing us a grave inevitability. We must persuade the white and brown people to pack up and ship off." Zanzibari culture was scattered around the world. A new rhythm of arabesque pollinated new cities with vibrant color, as they faded here.

In the nineteen-sixties, when waves of new ideas were crossing the earth, Stone Town was teased by free love, feminism and communism, but it was charmed by black power and underclass revolution. Our body politic, Africans were taking their autonomy in fits and starts. The Zanzibar Sultanate's wrestled control from the British protectorate and I thought it was the nightmare; the clash I saw in my visions. Black Africans had unsettled the English enough to leave slowly but a new Arab Sultanate had unwisely claimed power. The cauldron that slowly boiled underground had reached its brim. A month later it would boil over.

It was in that tense month that Busara died, leaving me to manage the tea shop alone. Running a business, raising a family, planning a funeral and giving out scrumptious warnings all made time for each other. In the tea shop, tragedy was framed as a lesson for Feride and Ignatio. "People die when their bodies become too old or they get hurt too badly." I said to them, and turned to funeral guests saying, "Blades are being sharpened, guns are being stockpiled." Everyone struggled to understand my words and some mourned too long, right up until the pot boiled over and spilled bloody revolution across the streets.

English, Omani, Parsi and Hindi people had to board ships and escape Mji Mkongwe before John Okello and the black revolution rose to slay them at the tips of their own weapons. It came to pass, and for the most part, the new rulers in Shangani were less corrupt, but there was no longer much profit in prophecy and most of the abandoned property, including the tea shop, was seized by the Afro-Shirazi Party. Tanzania was at the cusp of a wave of Africanism where everybody saw the future quite clearly, as we had. We moved into the booth and set up a humble living space. Despite financial trouble in a new nation, luck was at our heels. Feride was a wide-eyed little billy goat who loved the sea, and Ignatio always loved Feride, first as a sister.

Debts had to be collected and the tea shop was seized. Old buildings were reclaimed and new schools were established. The Afro-Shirazi Party decided to ruin and raze tea shop to make space for an open air market, which became the eastern border of the public square three blocks south of Beit al Ajaib and the old fort. When I produced the ancient deed that Busara had bequeathed to me and proved that this booth was owned and lived in by Africans, the men scratched their heads as they read it and spared the tiny booth from the hammer.

I became too weak to walk and adopted the most extreme custom of veiling the world from myself and myself from the world. I ensconced in my mystic space, which I kept private even from my children. Sometimes I paid local gangsters protection money. I also gave to the poor and arranged people to run my errands in order to keep my position in the small booth under the archway of the gate to the market.

I steer men toward their fates and encourage women's bravery and divine intuition. For longer than most of the residence of Stone town could remember, Kahina the eccentric and pious fortune teller is loved and respected. I give words to visions and empower men like Simbat to risk fortune, family and fate against slim chance.

Chapter 13 Bahtiyar

It's seven-thirty in the evening. He taps his foot impatiently. Off the mirror-glass of the blocky building, the shine sublimates vapor off the icy pavement in the square around him. There's a thin layer of snow whipping around as the sun is dropping behind crumbling buildings across the rivninland, featuring Debussy music one-hundred and one years after the Sarajevo incident. The prefecture displays a few bullet holes on a high corner. Bahtiyar flips open his phone and plays a game while he waits.

He's too old to have this temper and too young to be so callow. His pale, thin face is prone to bad looks with random passers-by. When he's not looking down at his phone or his feet he stares at women and raises his eyebrows. He notices some red and black bugs on the ground and cancels the game to crush them. He scowls and thinks about his roommates who are probably fretting over finals. Suckers. They should drop out. What's in store for Bahtiyar is an exciting and righteous life.

He values his short time at Sarajevo University because it had given him the opportunity to break away from the stifling ubiquity of his grandma and needy mom. He didn't like waking up early but in the evenings he was happy to come out for the social clubs. He loved talking about communism, multiculturalism, history and politics. Hearing opposing sides acculturated him to the lives and works of Guevara, Malcolm X and Tito. Vehemence was power. They were all so sure and if someone disagreed, they could back up their points with facts. Suddenly a head full of facts was of the utmost importance so he scoured wikis, archives and message boards to find clues, links and fuses. Eventually his curiosity got the better of him and he stumbled upon Islamic State recruiters and links to action. They invited him to come shoot guns and read the Koran.

Bahtiyar fell asleep to walk towards a deep, wide pit. With hands tied, looking ahead at more hands tied back to the guns, at the back of the head. It was a waking sensation too, it came from a life he didn't remember, but was taught never to forget. He remembered the symposiums, dedications, and memorials. He held his mother's hand and learned about his father's execution, his sister's rape. Survivors spoke—twenty widows for each man—about returning to Srebrenica. Hopeful politicians and Dutch money re-opened the salt mines and schools but they were mostly washed out. Homes were rebuilt, but bullet holes still shined rare beams of light across abandoned walls. Bahtiyar saw a classic horror film about a mummy awakened by a ray of starlight. From August until September, he noticed the sun would shine into his irises through the bullet holes in the evening.

He watched his mother roll doughballs flat for *borek*. Under the surface of the river, while he competed with friends to hold breath, he made his nightmares a fantasy. Thoughts of mass graves exploded through the dull throb of the flowing water. He imagined himself on his knees, in the same position his father must have been in in his last seconds. He looked down his right side, waiting for the sound of the pistol's hammer to click, but he was faster than the guns and raised his bound hands to

intercept the bullet in a flash. The dream bullet would sever the ropes but also graze his wrist letting fly ribbons of his blood and setting an hourglass of vitality. Like a supercharged ninja, Bahtiyar could dodge bullets, snap necks, re-purpose weapons and single handedly rout the ultra-nationalists. The tilted berets flew like Frisbees as he severed heads from shoulders. Blood mixed in midair ribbons. The fantasy was a time-killer, an antidepressant, and as much a part of him as his subtracted father.

He checks his phone. It's 7:33. He was instructed by his teachers to trust in Islam and to keep phone communication to a minimum. Especially in Sarajavo, Bahtiyar's feels the sting of prejudice and hate. At uni, he joined a club for peace and environmental activism after a sweet and outgoing girl named Edita invited him. "This is good for me because I really care about peace and the environment," he accepted. She smiled, said "see you there," gave a little wink and left.

At the first meeting, in a round of introductions he said outright, "I would get up and roll a car right now, burn a factory." Afterwards the meeting he backtracked, "I hope everyone got my joke. I know that burning cars causes more air pollution."

He came a little late to the next meeting. They were showing a film about jungle deforestation. He sat next to Edita. As he inched his chair towards her, she slid away. He continued to encroach upon her personal space until part of his ass, was on her chair and hers was half off. Later that week, a group started verbally abusing Bahtiyar in the dining hall. That time, he didn't talk back or fight back. Everytime he saw that she was surrounded by people, he couldn't get the powdery smell of her hugs out of his mind. He built himself up to approach and try a pickup line, "Global warming's your fault..." but she pretended not to hear.

The abuse got worse. People threw spitballs from the desks behind him, so he skid his desk forward and interrupted a lecture to fight. After landing a few hits he exited the classroom unemotionally. It was his last university class.

He spent the next few weeks online. Locked in his dorm room, he started to correspond with a new world, a world of righteousness, glory and freedom. Almost out of thin air, he was given a new reason to live and father figures who could return the life that was taken from Bosnian Muslims. He found people who laugh, smile and have power, wealth and love in their lives. He accepted the first challenge and with a small bag, he traveled to a mountain village to swear allegiance to the caliphate of Abu Bakir al Bagdadi.

The minibus wound through mountain roads to Gornja Maoca. Whirling gales of snow were pushing the vehicle around the roads as it crept up slower and slower, until the driver saw a line of red tail lights and came to a stop. The road was closed due to a fallen stone. Bahtiyar put on his hat, zipped up his jacket against the blizzard and stepped out with some of the other passengers. A sheer cliff dropped into a white swirling abyss to the left side and to the right, the rock wall rose into the same snowy darkness. "Got a cigarette?" he asked a traveler in his thirties who looked like he'd never cut his beard. They walked together up the road to see the stone blocking their path. It was about the size of a cow. He threw his cigarette over the cliff and declared, "By the will of Allah I summon the strength of a bull!" He laid his hands on the stone and struggling against it. Bahtiyar watched for a moment, shrugged dreamily and went back to the minibus to rest his cold eyes.

They arrived at the village just before dawn. The first *azan* was being pronounced as clear and crisp as the untouched snow. Gornja Maoca seemed pure and elemental as crystal water. The village was reduced to cylinders and cubes, surrounded by long unbroken borders, connected by smooth flat white plains. Dimensions of size and distance were obscured by a pure white dressing and a low, dim sun. The bearded man and Bahtiyar left tracks in the snow, walking towards typical red block houses at

the back edge of the village.

A scarred face watched them approach over square shoulders in a tan cover-all. He nodded and returned to shoveling the front walkway. An AK-47 was leaned against a cobblestone gateway. Bahtiyar recognized the black flag that drooped overhead. He didn't have to see it blow to know that it said *Allah Messenger Muhammad* with no hamza. Bahtiyar glanced up and said, "A noble flag." The man leaned against his shovel and greeted them removing a glove and shaking their hands firmly. He spoke in a mix of Arabic and Slavic, "Welcome, to Maocha Training Camp. Please join breakfast and afterwards you'll see the compound."

Bahtiyar heard a recitation that mixed the words of the Holy Koran with Bosnian. "Brothers of the Islamic State," he looked up, but couldn't see the speaker over the tall men. He pricked up his ears though. "Take strength now, because we wrestle our enemies soon. Eat the food that Allah's given, and was loved by our Prophet, Peace-be-on-His-Name. May it bring us power." He entered the building and saw a plate of dates on the table. Men stood around a samovar. Across the room, there was a serving station with bowls of boiled eggs, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, a large bronze samovar, and a pot of potatoes came through a pass-through window curtained off next to a closed door across the dining room.

As the men lined up, Bahtiyar noticed that the speaker was dressed in camouflage. Before long, he came directly to meet the newcomers. "Welcome brothers. Aside from sleeping and eating, your time will be spent with education, exercise and recreation. We will teach you to write straight, think straight and shoot straight. Soon you will join the caravans but now, eat and take strength. There are brides waiting for you in the Levent."

Breakfast began and they took their place in line. Someone whispered, "I hear they love blue eyes there." "We'll have as many wives as our balls can take!"

"Or we'll all share the same one."

They laughed and sipped their tea. Bahtiyar sat down to breakfast with seven other young men. None had been there for longer than a week. Six were Bosniaks and the last was a Gagauz from Moldova. "What do you mean no smoking?" they heart shouted from the doorway.

The Arab came to their table and greeted them. His voice was soft and breathy and he replaced *y* sounds with *h* sounds. "After breakfast you're going to shoot straight through the eyes of *Shaytan*. *Wallah* all who dam the waters and cauterize our faces. Kill them and scatter rose petals to cleanse the ground of their blood." He shifted to verse.

*Strike them with the strength that Allah gives you
Take the lives of those who block the river to you
Reach out your hands and let Allah empower you
To beat in the heads of anyone who oppressed you*

Released from hypnosis, Bahtiyar's attention drifted back to his surroundings, a newly built dining room with calligraphy about the caliphate. The Arab drew them in closer, "I was born into the family Saud and I thank them for the privilege to study abroad. I first traveled to Deoband, India where I studied Pashto, Urdu and Farsi there. When I was a boy, I came to fight Mujaheddin. I know the standard of war that we're capable of. I've seen soldiers storm villages in Srebrenica. I've walked through minefields into Warzistan. I've fought the Christian Crusaders around villages full of innocent children." he made and held eye contact with Bahtiyar, "Allah's blessings be upon the princes of Islam.

Eat now. After breakfast we tour the compound.”

It was a typical village yard filled with noisy farm birds and scrubby bushes. On the high edge of the yard, snowy pine trees glimmered in the new sun. Uphill, through a path in the forest, Bahtiyar noticed men running a course. From a distance, he heard them shouting and climbing a thick rope to pass over a high wall. They gathered on the opposite side. Bahtiyar introduced himself to the others smiling.

"You'll be too tired to masturbate at night," they laughed heartily. "Go ahead and try the course. My best time is six minutes. There's also a longer one with traps."

After the evening prayer the Arab approached Rabi slowly. He was wearing slippers and tan robes. He seemed much older. "My name is Abdullah Zaik al Muqrin. Jihad is my state of mind, and Caliphate is our State in the world. Both are states of readiness to serve Islam and rise to martyr. Physical, mental and spiritual you must train to the will of Allah Subhan. The Caliphate is established. It is here. You are a soldier in Jihad. When I came here, I was scarred and weary of battle. I came here to start a family but Allah had other plans and my sword has remained unsheathed for many years."

The teacher resumed, "We fought the Crusaders in Srebrenica. I remember it like yesterday. Muslims hadn't formed an army. For many years the crusaders had been raiding our houses and taking our weapons. When they came to kill us, few could resist. All the world failed us. We were being killed in shifts by Croats and Serbs. Ignored by the West, but also by the despots in Turkey, Iraq, Egypt... It was brave men from stateless regions in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and East Turkestan who came to Jihad. We formed small militias to defend the faithful. We were few and the Crusaders were many. We defended one village but another was sieged. The crusaders spread like fire and before long, it was all burning. When the war ended, there were fewer than a hundred mujaheddin left in Bosnia and we were being systematically assassinated. I hid in Albania. I went to Croatia. I tried to find comfort, but my jihad has never stopped and now I pass these messages to the new armies of the Caliphate. Stand up brother for Allah is the greatest and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah!"

He stood up. "We are bringing *sunah* that the world hasn't seen since the days of Hazreti Muhammad—peace be on his name. Abu Bakr al Bagdadi has the same spirit of truth and jihad as the first four caliphs of our glorious faith. Our success to reestablish the Caliphate brings us closer to the holy times of Abu Bakr al Zulfkir, spiritual successor and father in law to Hazreti Muhammad, our Exalted Prophet peace-be-on-his-name, with whom the line continues to our righteous caliph Abu-Bakr al Bagdadi. We will return all the lands of Muslims to the rule of Shariah across a great, new empire in the first and last Islamic state. Europe and America might be on top of the world, but they're due to be toppled. Allahu Akbar!"

"Allahu Akbar!" Bahtiyar echoed.

After that weekend, Bahtiyar rarely went to class. He read the Koran. He lived out of a backpack, sometimes staying in Gornja Maoca through to the next week. His dorm mates asked where he'd been and he said he was homesick. His mother called and he lied to her too, telling her that he'd met a nice girl and traveled to the thermal baths where she worked. The web of lies was calling him to a remarkable, one-way journey. Each week, the fundamental lessons his teachers were imprinting on him instilled in him confidence in both the greatness of the Caliphate, and his duty to serve it. Abdullah Zaik became the father that Bahtiyar never knew. He shared untold secrets about those men who were busy in the cradle of civilization carving out a new Caliphate with knives.

The wait is aggravating. He jerks his phone out again. His gaze snaps from moving cars to bicyclists to pedestrians to birds. He feels his reflexes elevated from the training and he's able to smile

and laugh, but he can't shake the wild look in his eyes. Older people waiting outside the shopping center leave his proximity but he couldn't care less about them. Working as a fighter is a fresh start. It will be easy to make friends of the Caliphate.

He face has always betrayed him, showing rage or wavering confidence when he needs to look warm and friendly. His lot in life prepared him for hardships. The young man who steps into the large vehicle with aggressive Englishmen and a veiled French woman is a far cry from the teenager who swept cigarette ashes from his mother's room and cradled her in bed when she refused to get up in the morning.

Chapter 14 Kapıkule

Rabi's vehicle slows down. Hayat looks out the window to see blurry red lights through the rain. Before funneling into a single lane at Kapıkule border crossing he wakes up his sleeping passengers, "Friends of Islam," prophetic, "We've born witness to *bid'ah*. Under a new shariyah we make *hudud*! And we travel to the new Islamic State as a testament to its righteousness and to live as our ancestors lived, in the Caliphate."

"Unh... Where are we? What are you proselytizing for? We've already said all that." Abu looks ahead and sees them slowly approaching a few dozen cars in line. "Are we at the border?" Above, there's angular archway with red letters reading *Kapıkule Gümrük Kapısı*. In the black wet night the lights are rotating compass needles on an off screen.

"Now and forever, our *Dalwah* follows the *sunnah* of *Muhammad nabina sallallaho alaihe wasalam*. We renounce our European identities as Muslims fighting *mujhadeen* for the Caliphate. Borders will be erased with our swords." He turns back and gives heavy looks at Abu, Tola and Bahtiyar who nod with squinted eyes.

"Turkey is not a friendly zone. It's apostate. After we pass this gate, the government and its agencies will not be friendly. Friends have opened this door and this door alone. If detained, wait silently and peacefully. Trust Allah, show no fear and answer no questions. We come as friends and guests to Istanbul."

Abu says casually from the back seat, "I've been here before, not too long ago."

"What'd you think?" Tola asks.

"Beautiful, with all the open water and ancient architecture. People—police officers, border guards, guys—they really only care about money, and sex. Just a couple of pounds got us out of a speeding ticket. I'm sure it's why Turkish women are so difficult. But *the* people, the mob, they'll tear down the walls of Jericho, and they're fucking serious about Sunni Islam. I saw a gang of Turks set a hotel on fire because there were some Alevis inside. And the police just let it happen. But anyways, Abdul's your uncle and we're through. The police are slaves to the Euro. We are slaves of Allah! They're either working with the Americans or with us."

Rabi retorts, "There's all sorts of Turks. Some are fighting Jihad here and thousands have traveled south to the Islamic State. Give them the respect they deserve."

Tola chimed in, "But I can't reconcile the way they dammed the Euphrates. To deny Muslims

water is to dig your own hell.”

“Yeah fuck the Turkish government. This guy Erdogan is just jealous because we've claimed Caliphate before he could.”

Bahtiyar doesn't understand English but sounds off, “I fuck Turkey, I fuck America! *Takbir!*” They laughed while shouting together, “*Allahu Akbar.*” “*Takbir*” “*Allahu Akbar*” *Takbir*” *Allahu Akbar.*”

Flashback a few days, on a London Avenue. Abu shouted, “That murderer Blair and his cowboy boyfriend ought to be in prison.”

“You mean Bush?” They were eating sunflower seeds in a crowded park, spitting the shells into a dustpan. A few days prior, Rabi's uncle had crashed a Lamborghini into a parking meter. He recommended A&W Autoshop where Abu'd been working long nights. He'd finished the repair and was dropping off the car with Rabi.

“How can they sleep at night? I know it was ten years ago but,” Rabi pops his lips “*shock and awe* as they rooted through my family's business, killed innocent people. Put kids, women and elderly in prisons and tortured them, just for working in the government. Sadaam, education minister... didn't fuckin matter. Iraqi families with roofs over their heads were exiled into the desert, bank accounts wiped out. It's amazing neither of these guys were assassinated.”

“Yeah, they're just the dirty fingers though. Israel's the whole hand. The Caliphate's first enemy is Israel, than America, than one it'll take out the European countries.”

Tola clears his throat, “The Ottoman Empire crumbled after World War One and Iraq was partitioned for the English, right?”

“Right,” said Abu, “and Syria for the French. Dirty Americans kept Palestine independent, kept it earmarked for Euro Jews. ”

Tola took the lead, “Yeah, the plan goes back a century at least.”

“The Sikes-Picot agreement. Have you heard it has been erased?”

“What's been erased?”

“The Sikes-Picot line, between Iraq and Syria. It is gone, finished, yesterday's news.”

Tola asked, “How do you erase a border?”

Abu responded, “Kill the guards, than drive a bulldozer through the checkpoint. I'll send you the video. It was glorious, and bloody grim. The mujaheddin told them that they were gonna kill them with a sword.” Rabi took out a pack of cigarettes, “Islamic State fighters keep their promises.”

The three young men paused and looked around. Three preteen girls were sitting on an embankment nearby. “Excuse me,” they captured passers-by attention through the fence and asked, “Do you smell poo?” “Yeah, that's definitely poo.” they giggled. Rabi, Tola and Abu smiled.

“Look at this,” Rabi, cleared his throat and pulled up a photo on his phone. It was Rabi as a boy getting sandwich-kissed by two men. One featured the unmistakable face of Sadaam Hussein in dark sunglasses and the other was dressed like an Imam. “This photo is about fifteen years old.”

“Fuckin hell mate, is that you kid? You look like a scarecrow.”

“My uncle used to work in the Ba'ath party. That's him with the beard. The other guy would

come round for dinner. My father used to tell me it was the president, but I found out later that he was just a body double. Saddam had dozens. He used them to bait assassins. Didn't help him in 2003 though. My uncle had a good job. He worked in the ministry of education. They had a new initiative called Return to Faith"

"What's that?"

"*Yani* in the 90s, the Ba'ath party made a deal with conservatives to teach Islam in public schools. Back then, Iraq had the best public schools in the Muslim world. My uncle worked with religious clerics to write up courses in Islam. He taught the Koran around Iraq for fifteen years before 2003. Now he's on international hit lists for supporting Shariah."

"Is he still alive?"

"Yeah, in France. He stole a dead man's identity and moved to Paris. He coordinates action and rarely leaves his apartment. I think he's ISIS. Noone even knows he's alive. He sent me a message a while back though. Very secretive. He says he works with important people."

"Straight up?"

"Yeah, probably al Bagdadi."

"I gotta admit... I've seen the news propaganda, and I've seen the ISIS propaganda, and I gotta say ISIS stuff is a lot more compelling."

"We could go. Even this evening we could go. Just saying. There's nothing stopping us and a lot of money there."

"Man, can I get an advance?"

"I tell you what. If you can get a kilogram of superior quality amphetamine powder. I'll pay you ten-thousand pounds before we leave."

"Are you serious? What are you gonna do? Bring it there?"

"Yeah mate. People in the Levent have been on speed for years. It's crazy popular because they treat it like it's candy. It's called Captagon. But there's silent war over it. If the Saudi donors get their way, then all the supply has already been trashed. Either way, it's a wide open market."

"So we're gonna push pills in ISIS?"

"You'd rather stay here?"

Chapter 15 Fatih

Before dawn, a curtain of rainwater guilds an enclosure; a small passageway from a park to a square between two walls of ancient stone. At a low table, a man with a white beard leans against the wall and three young men sit, taking small sips from their tulip shaped glasses. The overarching aqueduct runs heavily along the crest of the Fatih peninsula and shelters tea drinkers under its arches. Under their robes, they're wearing thermal underwear and under their boots, they're wearing thick leather socks. The speaker is about to begin a story. He sips his tea and clears his throat.

“After one of Hazreti Muhammad—peace be on his name—’s particularly telling recitations, he fell to the ground exhausted and slept. He was carried to bed by his scribe Abdullah Radi Allahy Anha. The next morning, he woke and wanted a date before he prayed, but not just any date, a black date from Persia. Hazreti Muhammad looked in the storerooms, but couldn’t find any. He considered this strange because he’d just bought a large box.. Later his scribe returned with fine dates from Jerusalem.

Hazreti Muhammad asked, 'Where did you get these dates and why did you trade the old ones?'

'I wanted only the best for my Prophet,' replied Abdullah.

Muhammad—peace be on his name—considered and replied sternly, 'No, this is *riba* and the sin is punishable by atonement. Halal business doesn't trade up. This is similar to the sin of charging interest on money lending and laundering. To trade for a lesser amount of a higher quality of the same food product is a transaction of excess. We must give these dates up too and eat grain with goat’s milk.'

'Yes sir, I understand.'

'I traded food for company and end up with neither, praise Allah.'

'Well, my prophet, I've returned with fewer dates but I also made 20 dinar.'

'And how, brother, did you make 20 dinar? The Persian dates might have sold for less than one dinar and you return with expensive dates and so much money.'

'Well,' he paused a moment, considering how best to phrase the truth. 'Last week, you trimmed your mustache by the river?'

'Yes, I remember I had just detailed the righteousness of atonement.'

'I was downstream. A fish ate something off the surface and spat it out. It was the hairs of your moustache, and I sold them at market.' said Abdullah.

The lecturer clears his throat and asks his students if they would drink another tea. They answered affirmatively so he holds up four fingers and whistles to a young boy who brings tea around to their table. “Now what do you think the lesson of the prophet Muhammad was to his scribe? And what lesson does this story teach us?”

“I believe Hazreti Muhammad—peace be on his name—wanted to teach his scribe that the *ummah* was more important than getting good dates.”

“It teaches us the value of modesty Ahmet *hoca*.”

“Ahmet *hoca*, Hazreti Muhammad—peace be on his name— told Abdullah that we should trade gold for an equal amount of gold, silver for an equal amount of silver, and dates for an equal amount of dates, but the moustache was a commodity that helped build the mosque and therefore elevate the *ummah*.”

The lecture continues.

“The prophet Muhammad—peace be on his name—heard that his moustache was sold at market and asked, 'So... how does the selling of my moustache at market help Islam?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'When a trifle is sold for a fortune, who has sinned, the buyer or the seller? And who is hurt by

this transaction?'

'I'm sorry. I will give you the money.'

'It is Islam that is hurt by this transaction' he cut him off, 'I am a man and a businessman as well. It is Allah that we must pray to and the responsibility of the buyer to see his idolatry. As for the money, we will hire a security guard to the construction of the mosque. People are stealing our nails.'"

The lecturer's tea has gone cold but he finishes it anyway and throws down some coins. He stands up satisfied that his lesson had made an impact. He opens his umbrella and enters the yellow night. He checks his phone and finds a message. *We've just passed the border.*

The strangers are near. He'd heard that Muslims raised in Europe often lacked common sense. They have ants in their pockets and a proclivity for drugs, music and the mixing of the sexes. He first calls Nur, his wife, and lets her know she will receive a guest, then responds *It's raining in Istanbul. What time can we expect you?*

He continues walking past shop windows full of honeycomb and whole legs of lamb—old shops owned by Kurds—the enemy you know. Falafel and Syrian coffeshops have filled in the gaps in this row. These new businesses sell everything at half the price of their Turkish predecessors. Ahmet cringes with scorn and pity as he sees their awkward smiles in the mosque green. With the same fierce nationalism that filters all his thoughts he considers his guests coming from Europe. At least they're going in the right direction. How can the resurgence of the armies of the caliphate lead so many young men to flee from the Islamic State?

His phone buzzes, *I will be outside your home at noon, inshallah*

"We're the only group capable of reclaiming all of the ancestral cities under Islam—Istanbul, Kabul, Kudus, all of them—under the perfect flag of the believers. We've made it is possible for an Islamic Caliphate to rise and rise again. A state, I mean a superpower, establishing something for the future. Not confined within a geographical framework like Iraq, not like that. Bigger, bigger than that. It's on a world level. We will rule the world."

The city's unruly as they approach from the west. Skyscrapers in progress, pits the size of parks. Paris, London, Milan, and Sarajevo; it's googled that there are more people here than all those cities combined. They wait at a stoplight. Tall buildings rise on both sides, most lacking walls and draped with billowing sheets of synthetic, orange canvas. Rabi looks down at the map and scrolls his thumb along the seashore, to the end of the peninsula.

Pedestrians group together and push against traffic, jockeying across intersections as cars pile in and lay on horns, a cacophony of clashing pitches. One plays the theme from the Godfather. Children jump over the highway barriers and pile into the back of pickup trucks filled with melons.

They drive under an ancient wall of heavy, cobbled stone. Hunched old women hobble up and tap against the windshield with pens, packets of tissues and bottles of water. They bless in Arabic and plead in Turkish. Rabi follows his GPS through a labyrinth of side streets, sharp turns and steep hills up towards Ahmet's apartment block on Akdeniz Avenue. They pass ancient, red masonry with thin, round domes on top, buildings for worship, culture and education. It gives a passing impression of Istanbul's history. The GPS announces their arrival.

Hayat's eye in the rear view mirror is palpable. Rabi turns around and looks into its black

center. "Hayat, we're leaving you here to meet Nur. She's a trustworthy friend and perhaps Ahmet will come speak to you later. We'll meet him now to pray."

Abu verbalizes, "I'm thirsty. Anybody wanna go to that shop?"

"I'll come out. Come on Bahtiyar, let's go get some water."

Outside, the wet ground smells like cold pavement. The sun is up but there are dark puddles and the scooters and motorcycles smear tracks on the sidewalks. Pedestrians see the doors open to a conspicuous vehicle with English plates. Shocked by the massive black man who gets out, they point and murmur. A few children group up nearby saying racial slurs and doing gestures from rap videos. They take photos on their smartphones.

"Thank you. Thank you for the ride. I don't know how to thank you. You really saved my life. And we're going to the Caliphate. I thank you with all my heart and I hope that we..." the doors open and Abu enters emptyhanded.

"Turks man," he says, "creepy."

"Go meet Nur," says Rabi to Hayat. "I'll send you a message."

She turns down her eyes for a moment then opens them like a peacock. Hayat smiles and slightly purses her lips. She gets out and sees a woman in a black niqab with happy eyes waving and approaching with a glossy bag. Rabi comes around to grab Hayat's luggage while she gets out. The neighborhood stops staring when the women go inside.

Tola hollers, "Damn, look at this city. This is crazy. I reckon the pubs are full of pussy though."

"Are you fucking serious?"

"You think another night stand is going to burn my soul? I know where I am."

"And where the fuck are we? Tola? Eh, Abu Akra? Do either of you even know?"

"Yeah mate, we're in Fatih, going to meet the long-awaited Ahmet Hodja. And last time I was here, I had a bitch on both arms."

He swings the car door open, "Yeah yeah, sure Don Juan," Rabi stretches his eyebrows, gets in the vehicle and starts the engine. "He rolls down the window and motions for Bahtiyar to get in. "Let's go."

A massive dome looms down the Boulevard. The street signs tell them they're on Fevzi Paşa Blvd. They turn by some Roman ruins, then left on Aslanhane Street and park in the back of a crowded lot. Bahtiyar gets out and walks off hastily.

Rabi gossips with a sharp exhale, "this Bosniak kid can't speak Arabic. Where's he going? They way they talked about him, I thought he was some kind of big shot. Do you know how much time we lost driving to Sarajevo? If he's heavier than he's worth, I'm gonna put him on the garden path."

"What could he do for the State? Do you think he's got potential?"

"I dunno why Abdul would ask me to pick him up if he didn't."

They get out and look around aloof. Rabi takes a moment to send another text message. Abu sneaks a look and sees him write something about tea.

Tola smacks Abu in the chest and points ahead. Bahtiyar's leaning against a wall next to two girls wearing dresses. The skinny Bosniak with the bad skin is flirting with one of them and the other is on her phone. Abu's eyes gape in disbelief. They pass inconspicuously and notice that Bahtiyar is

speaking Turkish and she's smiling. As they walk by, Abu and Tola give him low-key kudos behind her back but Rabi shoots a nasty glance.

Outside the huge mosque is a square cluttered by grapevines, families, salesmen, beggars, dogs, remote control cars and all kinds of urban social life. Little green spots are surrounded by low fences where babies sit and grasp at long grass. All around are smooth slabs of white marble.

A teenager on Rollerblades is skating fast towards two kids lying side-by-side on the ground. He pumps his legs but aborts the jump within a few meters. Around the edge of the square, kids kick soccer balls hard, using the mosque's body washing tables as goalposts. Corrugated metal barriers block off a large corner of the mosque complex. Dozens of cats ignore slushy food atop marble slabs stacked along a stone wall. Abu, Tola and Rabi walk onto the flat, stone square where young women sell socks for charity.

This is not the world renowned Blue Mosque in all the tourism books. This is Fatih Mosque; older, more worn and certain. Far from the main city tours, this public mosque was commissioned and named after Mehmet the Conqueror, the first Sultan of Istanbul. He broke ground here for a cemetery, hospital, library, rest houses, mosque and schools for the new Muslim population of Istanbul. He didn't forget to leave room for his own tomb however, its location has changed so the few who know where he's buried claim his spirit sits in a tree that grows there on Kindil nights.

The travelers feel exposed but hold their eyes level, scanning the many faces. Ahmet, picks them out of the crowd and approaches. "Selam alekum. Welcome to Turkey." His smile is low and loose but the upper part of his face crinkles into tight ridges above a high brow. He barrages them with questions,

"Are you hungry? Let us pray. After we will eat the best breakfast you've ever tasted. I promise you *vallah!* Wait, where is other man? Where is man from Bosnia?"

"Oh, he met a friend on the street. He'll be along soon," says Rabi. They take a wide glance and Abu sees him casually approaching and looking sideways into the cemetery gardens.

"I hear you came far and fast." Abdul knows their ages, backgrounds and even a few personality details. Ahmet hums decisively and says, "Ok let us wash."

They walk towards the faucets, remove their shoes, sit on the stools and turn towards the water. Abu gives three splashes of water to the face, three on each arm to the elbow. Thrice he rubs each hand with the other, swishes water in the mouth, lightly snorts it to his nostrils and splashes himself once to the hairline. He cups his hand and splashes two handfuls to the back of the ears and one behind the back of the neck. He places his toes and feet under the stream of water.

Ahmet sits next to Rabi and asks if they'd found la Fistanera. "Has Hayat seen the vice and sin of French culture?"

Rabi's response is more dialectic, "Yes *Hodja*. I'm sure she'll decry France."

"Allah is laying your path," assured Ahmet before turning and scowling, "and the sooner you pass from Turkey the better. The drugs you peddle have no place here. The Ottomans Caliphate took up the mantle from the kaaba due to the attrition of the Arab Caliphs and it will happen again. You'll wear yourself thin pill by pill, and we will keep the *ummah*."

They regroup on the stone steps. There's a massive wooden door, intricately carved with light and dark patterns and angles framing each other. There are two heavy brass rings in the center of each door. One is swung wide open. They slip off their shoes and enter past bent men slipping off theirs. The pharyngeal sounds of the imam's harmonious voice echo around like ripples on a pond. The

peacefulness is a treat for their senses. The tension of the ride is washed away.

Abu inhales deeply. Sandalwood oil soothes his mind. He needs a moment of repose. All through this journey he's been hit with a clarity of personal culpability. He realized he only started to hate Western Culture after dropping out of University. He realized that he can't find a long term girlfriend because he keep disrespecting the ones who stick around. He can't stop thinking about the taxi driver. He's a murderer, or would it be manslaughter? Is there anything in his life left aside from Jihad? Did all of this happen because he got radicalized by some videos? Excited by war? Did he decide that he could no longer be complicit, or did English Imperialism chew him up and spit him out just like his mother. He used to be balanced, honest but these radicals taught him that *jihad* is to spend the self to the perfection of Islam. In England, that means exertion, spirituality, self-purification and devotion, but in the lands of Islam, it always means Shariah law. On the borderlands it means the sword. Jihad is a firebrand for young Muslims against skinhead gangs with knives and empty bottles. Despite street battles, Jihad can only really happen in pockets of Europe until it has proved itself in Arabia. The State recruiters targeted him exactly; male, first generation immigrant, raised in the Mosque, dropped out of school, late 20s, strong as an ox, tried it all already. He learned about the subway bombers and weddings targeted in Afghanistan as retaliation. Zionist conspiracies rang truer than the bland newscasts about ceasefires. The mujaheddin in dimly lit caves and bare rooms made bold declarations about centuries of colonial oppression in Africa and Asia. All those sermons and details shaped his curiosity to the Islamic State. Leaving England to see if it's worth fighting had been the plan. The last minute murder was the tipping point. Today though, inside this huge mosque, in a city of Muslims that haven't seen war for a hundred years, peace is worth fighting for.

"Look at this dome," Tola has never seen imperial era mosques, "Godzilla could hide in here."

Rabi asks Ahmet Bey, "*Habib yani*, this mosque was built to honor the conquerors of Istanbul?"

"Yes, Mehmet the Conqueror Sultan. His tomb is on the premises and open to visitors. Would you like to visit it?"

Not far away, Nur brings Hayat to a dormitory for young women. The flat is unadorned and perfumed. It has 3 large rooms, each with four beds and a communal hamper overflowing with fleece pants, scarves, underclothes, towels and sheets. The small kitchen is tidy aside from a large trashcan overflowing with bags, plastic cups and fast food wrappers. The furniture in the living room is cheap, but new. There's a television hanging on the wall, and a long mirror hanging over a couch. The satin curtains are drawn. A large plastic table sits across the room and there are some chairs scattered around it.

"Welcome, to our new guest. She's from Paris."

The girls introduce themselves. Some of their names register momentarily. Nur backs out to the hallway to busy herself in the linen closet.

"*Parlez-vous Français?*"

"*Ahah! Hah, I... no French.*"

"English"

"*Yok!*" a few girls tut their tongues and turn up their noses. Hayat feels dismissed and looks away.

"*Arabi?*"

"*Naeam! Merci! Shukran!*"

“*Ahlan Sadakati! Esmee Zeynep.*”

“*Ma Esmouki?*”

Hayat is a bit dismayed, she knows she shouldn't introduce herself as *Hayat Bournamecca, Martyr's Widow*, but she's just as careless and reckless as the people around her so says, “Hayat. *Ma Menatuki?*”

“*Ne?*” the conversation has reached its linguistic limit. “Ahhh, *shway, shway.*” Zeynep remembers something and says something Hayat can't understand, “*bi dakika*” before running to her bedroom. She brings back a beginner level, Classical Arabic study book. Hayat takes a look and they share a briefly pleasant moment correcting pronunciation of basic phrases. The other girls give interested looks from their private conversations, studies and television shows.

Nur returns noisily. She has taken off her niqab and is wearing a green blouse and cream colored trousers. Her face shows that she might be in her late fifties and she has a few moles on her neck. She's holding something behind her back which is pushing her tits forward. “Are you hungry? Would you like to eat something? Let me show you your house first, then we can eat something.” She shows a shopping bag. “And first,” Nur presents the bag. “A welcome gift.” Hayat reaches in and takes the black article of cloth out. Nur asks before she can respond, “Is it true that wearing hijab in Paris can get you arrested?”

“Yes, in a school or government building.”

“It was the same in Turkey until just last year. Have you ever worn a niqab?” Nur drapes the long black garment between two fingers. She flares the other six attractively.

“No, never a niqab. My husband Amedy asked me to practice hijab after we married but I only wore a scarf.”

“Yes,” as the martyr is mentioned, Nur winces. “Well, we aren't on display for the men of the world now, are we?”

Hayat nods. As she is pulling the black garment over her head she recalls Amedy's deep voice. He used to say, “Life is not a show. You're my wife now, not a whore. Please hijab.”

One Ramadan evening years earlier, Amedy and Hayat were invited to share *iftar* dinner with a family who ran an Islamic business incubator. Amedy had been courting them for a loan to buy a truck. They arrived before sundown to find the table filled with roasted lamb, appetizers and a variety of dates. Amedy sat between Hayat and Muhammad, the youngest son of their hosts. As the daylight grew dim they smiled and blessed each other for a successful fast. Hayat noticed the boy sneakily grab a date before last sliver of daylight sank below the horizon. She stretched an eyebrow at Amedy as the boy popped it into his mouth. Amedy scowled and slapped the boy on the back of the neck. He gasped sharply, sucking the fruit into his airway. Then he brought his hands to his throat. His face showed panic. The parents rose from their seats. The boy grabbed the table cloth and clenched his fists tightly at his chest. Mother circled around the table and grabbed her son to administer the Heimlich Maneuver. As she hoisted him up, the boy jerked the white cloth from the table. Dishes of eggplant puree and roasted lamb spilled onto Amedy and Hayat. Glasses of lemonade bounced off their laps and shattered on the floor. Hayat made a pitiful sound, flailed her arms and batted dates through the air. Mother hugged her boy from behind and found a bubble of air to launch the date from his lungs. His face was dark purple. A hard pump and expert fists plunged the offending article out of the boy's constricted trachea. The blockage struck Amedy on the forehead. The boy's noisy, new breaths sunk deep between his cries. Dinner was postponed after a rush to the hospital with the only food passing anyone's lips

having been spit right out. Amedy's face held a reprehensible look as he and Hayat ate fast food in silence. In Hayat's Istanbul pension that face loosened from the concretion of their marriage and sublimed into a daydream perched on a palanquin daydreaming about the romance awaiting her as she picks nuts and dates from a tray full of rubies and gems. Perhaps these memories will demand one last consideration before she remarries.

Ahmet stands next to a thick marble columns holding up the main dome in Fatih Mosque. "Today's generation of Muslims worship quietly inside mosques established by great conquest. When Hazreti Muhammad lived, he prophesied that a magnificent army would conquer this city. Fatih Sultan Mehmet led the Ottoman armies to victory and established the fourth caliphate but, even the Ottoman Empire died and the Caliphate was buried with it. The Turkish Republic was founded by alcoholics. In those days, imams who called the prayer in Arabic were executed. Only in recent years, by the will of Allah, has true Islamic education returned and we believe that the sixth Caliphate will be a peaceful jihad. We live in exciting times. This mosque, the caliphate and the greatest victories of Islam were won through *jihad* of the sword and not through quiet worship or personal struggle. The greatest worship is to fight *jihad* by day and night. Today *inshallah tala*, young Muslims again have that chance." His quiet voice is brimming with joy and the corners of his eyes raise to his brow.

"The tomb of our great Conqueror lies ahead of us," Ahmet announces as they pass through a marble archway to the adjacent cemetery gardens. Countless footsteps across this threshold have worn the ancient marble edges smooth. Abu pauses and looks up at the circular calligraphy on the arch. The letters are Arabic, In the name of Allah the Merciful. He passes through the cemetery of stone turbans perched at the head of tall headstones inscribed with unrecognizable engravings. The graveyard is full of flowers, palms and evergreens.

"Did the Ottomans use Arabic?" asks Abu.

"Like modern Turks, the Ottomans only used Arabic for religious purpose. In their everyday lives they spoke their own language and wrote it with an Arabic script."

"When did the alphabet change?"

Nearly a hundred years ago, when the first president of the Turkish Republic issued a mandate requiring newspapers, schools and literature to henceforth be written in New Turkish with a Latin script."

Owing to the childhood religious studies, Abu and Rabi are both fluent in Classical Arabic as well as baqala slang. Bahtiyar and Tola are both beginners. Above the tomb door to Fatih Sultan Mehmet's coffin are green plaques with golden calligraphs.

"Fatih Sultan Mehmet fulfilled Muhammad's Hadith of Konstantinople, but it was first weakened by crusaders from France, Italy and England. They were sent by Allah as marauders. They ignored the pope and their king. They stormed into the Byzantine city and besieged the peninsula. They lingered and sacked the city even after their king had returned to his thrown. That was the last time the thrown between the Black and White seas passed from king to king. *Subhan Allah* reduced Muslim casualties by weakening the city."

The five men eat breakfast while Ahmet continues to dominate the conversation with declarations of pride about Turkish culture and Islam. The tabletop is completely covered. The restaurant boasts 161 different dishes, most of which sit half-eaten under their noses. "Turkish, is one of the world's great kitchen cultures. This restaurant is from a city with the world's best kebabs; Hatay, on the Mediterranean, is an intersting city. It is Turkish but Arabs live there. Turks and Arabs are

brothers in Islam and we will live under the Shariat.”

A short tram ride later and the travelers find themselves under a stone archway. They continue to follow and are amazed by antique swords. They're stupefied by fast talking salesmen in traditional garb. And they're breathlessly outpaced by Ahmet in the crowded labyrinthine alleys. The architecture and design, the products, and even the pedestrians are increasingly colorful as they approach the lavish inner *han* of the world famous marketplace.

In front of a fountain, Ahmet turns with his arms wide and declares, “This is the Grand Bazaar, much the same as it was hundreds of years ago. This was the world trade center of the Ottoman Empire, and a lot more durable than the American Empire that tried to replicate it.”

There, they meet Hayat, and Nur. They greet them and walk ahead of them to Topkapı Palace. “Here are the *Babus-selam*,” continues Ahmet. “Notice these two towers are in the European style. This gateway was reserved for European diplomats. Only sultans could pass it on horseback. Look straight through to see the executioner's fountain.”

They purchase tickets and funnel into an incredibly crowded, single turnstile. Long chains of children holding hands, women with limited vision and large, loud men press inwards towards the metal detector.

“*Shirk*” Ahmet begins a sermon in the picturesque courtyard they've reached, “is a dangerous sin and Muslims do not worship objects or pictures. The sacred relics within Topkapı Palace are, in fact, improperly named. These personal items that were touched and used by the prophet Muhammad—peace be upon his name—as well as earlier prophets, are less sacred than the verses of the Noble Koran. They are simply items that teach us about the life of the prophet. No more sacred than my hat.”

Inside the chambers of the sacred trust they gaze upon ancient sheets of parchment. “This is the letter written by the prophet Muhammad—peace be upon his name—to Muqawqis, Governor of Egypt under the Byzantine Empire. The letter announces the foundation of Islam and invites the Egyptians to join the Caliphate.” Abu and Rabi read the restored transcription, written in unaccented handwriting.

The seal at the bottom is a familiar stamp used by ISIS, a black circle surrounding the words *Allah Messenger Muhammad*; a mark denoting an allegiance. All five travelers and two scholars have seen this symbol on flags, graffiti and documents in recent years.

They also view the clothes, gifts, hair, teeth and footprints of their prophet before passing into the room which features historical items dating back many thousands of years, such as the unadorned wooden staff of Moses, the iron cooking pot of Abraham, and the curiously well-kept, cloth turban of the Egyptian King Joseph. Tola, with little restraint and a deep interest in African and Egyptian kings, stifles a scoff. “This,” Tola gestures at the stick, “is the staff of Moses? What-with he thirty five-hundred years ago split the seas open? Are you joking?”

Ahmet looked at him stunned, “Hazreti Musa, who by all accounts Islamic, Christian or Hebrew brought that stick down against the Egyptians and shepherded God's people out of slavery. Man where, perchance, was our sacred staff hiding for 3500 years? Inside the pyramids?”

“*Yani*” he swallowed. “Many of them were indeed gifts from the Vizir of Egypt.”

“Hmm.”