

Bad Looks

By Thermanos Bueul

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Chapter 1 I presume

In the Kipengere Range, Ignatio whistled a lonely tune to the wind. He'd led his flock up to a cold height to feed on thyme, and held his collar tight with his left hand. Having gripped the curved head of his long crook, he stretched both flanks of his torso. He considered the way into the foothills; two familiar roads down, one over the ridge and another through the trees. He squinted into the distance. Nestled in a deep cut valley, he saw little wisps of smoke rising from his village. Further along, he could hear the sound of hyenas crying. The air froze with the half moon rise.

The sheep set a slow pace. He'd tended his flock for years and was wealthy. Kinga villagers were meek and didn't bling out for the swagger shows on the plains. Plus he was in love, traveling with the woman of his life. He wanted her to bathe him that night.

He took a glass flask out of his pack and sipped on banana wine. It seemed to sharpen his senses. Something was awry. An unnatural grumbling in his left ear fractured his fantasies. He looked uphill to see four vehicles driving down the winding road. The sinking feeling that hit his gut sent him running down ahead of his grazing sheep. It could be a government convoy or elephant hunters, but Ignatio had heard the news of village raids around Lake Malawi. It could only be, bandits.

He had strong legs and ran down fast. Grim thoughts gave him the speed of a cheetah. He was bounding faster with each crashing step, beating the ground with the thick soles of his feet, sending rocks and rubble tumbling after him. Eagles screeched ahead. He leapt from a low precipice and rolled to his feet on the scrubby grass below. His ankles were cut and bruised but his knees pushed him along faster.

In the village below, eagles congregated in trees over the tea shop. "Ahoi there, look up!" Men rose up noticing the birds were perturbed. They beat, alighted and called shrill warnings. Men pointed and queried, "What are they telling us?"

Just then, Ignatio barreled in shouting -Bandits!- between gasping breaths. "Four vehicles are coming. Maybe thirty men." Some groaned and grabbed their foreheads. "These men come with heavy blades and bullets, and kill without mercy!" There was little hope. "We can't defend with our weapons." "We should make a deal. Offer up some gold, sacks of coffee, a woman to appease." "Our daughters aren't trade goods!" "Whatever we offer them, they'll only want more. Let's kill every one of them."

Without coming to a consensus, the men split up. Some brought their families to the forest. Ignatio and the other warriors took spears in ambush at the edge of the road. "Take these weapons to the forest. Flee!"

The bandit's vehicles precursed their appearance. Blades flashed the icy moonlight. Machine guns clapped the air. Their vicious faces caterwauled murder. At the ridge road the first villager stood up and threw a spear. It missed to the road just behind the speeding jeep. He reached for his blowgun but was blasted across the chest by bullets.

They mercilessly pushed into the city and split into groups. One went to the village green and the other towards a large estate within a stone wall, broken through with a rocket. The guard at the old house's ears rang as he ended the lives of four bandits but he was shot while reloading his pistol.

Four bandits swarmed into the colonial estate and stole sacks of coffee, silver platters and jewelry. Bottles of scotch, were opened and guzzled while they turned the contents of cabinets onto the floor, breaking calabash gourds and looking to rape, kill or kidnap.

A half dozen bandits ran into the forest where they tried to dislodge villagers from their hiding places with hide-and-seek taunts. A wife of the village threw a large rock down from a tree and quietly knocked a bandit out. Another villager skewered one in the darkness. She covered the stuck bandit's mouth but was bitten and released. The bandit screamed out a menacing cry.

Ignatio entered the dark forest whispering loudly -Fariha, Fariha!-

"Shhhh! If you don't shut up, you'll kill us all!"

He crept out and stole through the chaos. A scattering of hot coals light up the night at the edge of the forest. There was also a flat, sharp rock which he picked up. Inside the village, the bandits had little resistance. Homes were burning. Everyone cried out to see their neighbors dead across their doorways. Warriors continued to fight even with holes punched through them. As Ignatio approached his home, the village burned. The pack, wearing leather and denim, were carrying bottles, metal, ivory and sacks of goods back to their jeeps.

Ignatio managed to ambush one from behind an unburnt corner of a house and broke his head open with his rock, bloodying it. He figured to sneak across and into his home and pick up a spear. It was across the town square where the bandits had parked three trucks and about a dozen savage men stood around, satisfied with what they'd plundered, drunk, and content to abandon a few of their own for dead. The last band was jogging up drunkenly, fastening their belts. The fourth jeep sped into the town square. Ignatio noticed, emerging from the flares and shadows, a fat, vile bandit carrying a woman over his shoulder. The beast stumbled with his burden across the square and Ignatio's heart pumped flames as the unconscious face of Fariha zoomed into focus across the long square.

He charged at the evil scum. The villain threw her into the back to be bound while a third bandit stood up though the crossbars, Ignatio threw the spear. The vengeful lover, loath to see her dragged off like this, was nearing the vehicle. The gunner raised his weapon and fired. Ignatio ducked, one bullet

grazed flew through his hair. Two more missed shots later and the gun was empty. Ignatio's stone flew and shattered the windscreen. There was empty space between their adversarial eyes. The jeep veered and closed in on the hopeless warrior, who grabbed a shard of broken pottery from the ground. He sent it spinning off his finger towards the driver and hit him in the neck and saw a spray of blood. The villain started to bleed but the jeep sped up and Ignatio got hit. The burning village reflected in his eyes as his shoulder shattered the front headlight. Ignatio fell unconscious.

Chapter 2 Brogue

Metal claps, muffled by sweat saturate air whirling into fan blades. English voices count “1, 2, 3...”, “attaboy, crank down”, roars, encouragement and accomplishment, more reps and dissolved electrolytes as fighters prepare for work.

Between the concrete walls, among exercise equipment, crowded in, a guy in a jersey—Cork 9—asks, “Who's te keepah for te Turkish team?” His voice is like a tin whistle. “Whatsisname? Eh?... Musa... Musala?”

Abu and Tola are in earshot but strike up a conversation at the same timbre. Tola says, “Ya know, this used to be a proper boxing gym, and now we've got American football on the telly every morning. Just ads and ref's calls. What's next, a juice bar?”

“Isn't anyone else proud to say we're not the cheapest gym in London anymore?” Jermaine had hurled for Cork. Now he works at the door of a club in North London. This morning he's come to the gym wearing his own jersey. He keeps talking, “He's... Paraguayan, no. Uruguan? Did ya see how quick he stopped Chelsea shots?” aggressively, “Shots! Shots! Shots we had, on goal! ... Muslera! that'sis name. Like BLAM! with the Mickeymouse gloves. b'DOW! all our best shots. I hate to see a match draw for Chelsea. Even to us, tis their worst game. I'll be in Turkey next week, properly settle the draw, I will.” Like the climax of a sweaty opus, with a change of timbre Abu says, “I'll score one on Turkey tonight.”

“Yeah, get him Drogba,” Jermaine cocks an eyebrow.

“Got a date with a pretty little Turk from Saint George.”

“She kept your number after you dropped out? Ain't she a doctor?”

“Yeah, intern by now, at Saint Pancras.”

“I like t'way t'Turkish girls play. Come off a winner's ball. Root last week. Kissed her goodnight and told her not to get pulled in any doors from Camden to Trafalgar. Now she sends me naughty pictures on Sunday afternoon. You're going out with a doctor, and a West End girl! Cheers to you mate. Bet she'll zone you out, have you running circles round the middle. No penetration.”

“Yeah, well maybe that, and maybe I've got a play that'll drop her panties even this evening” as Abu swings his towel around his neck and jumps up to grip the chin-up bar. He hoists his huge body, ridgy legs, size 15 trainers, arched shoulders and all, once from the biceps. Two. In his rounded rectangle head, his eyes cross. Three...

Abu is a young man reckoning with adulthood. At the awkward age of 14 he moved to the Orphanage of the East Mosque where he gained a sprawling surrogate family who argued about what was best. They guided him to study medicine at St. George University but he dropped out unceremoniously. He started an underground auto repair service with his friend Tola. Tola could sell anything because he always had something funny to say.

In her last months, his mother's eyes were like beach glass. She whispered nonsensical epitaphs, frequently in Swahili, "My gentle little elephant, have you caught any prawns?" Social Services just left him alone in the flat that his dad had paid for. Once he cooed and nuzzled the cashier. She took pity on him and gave him discounts and freebies but his childishness that love evolved into a kind of femininity that the kids at school were merciless about. When she died, he willed his feminine traits away at the boxing gym. As he grew, girls could neither trust nor resist him and neither he nor they wanted any conversation the morning after. They considered him a dangerous man due to a rough childhood.

He's been coming to this gym since he was sixteen (actually nineteen, foreshadowing sake). Jermaine knows he's hiding something because he's seen his ID. He has a vested interest in seeing Ws on his scorecard. A shady past has worked to his advantage. At 6 foot and 15 stone, Abu can threaten without raising his voice. His nose was flat against his stiff jaw like an anvil. His cheeks and temples are like two bricks. He repairs engines part-time and otherwise hasn't developed a big ambition, but he's got his 400 kg deadlift, as well as his date tonight, well under control. He's late to mosque though, probably have to sit outside.

Chapter 3 Zig Zag

In the mosque Abu's eyes rest as peacefully as a bird in a tree. He stands tall enough to see kufi hats like white carnations. Shopkeepers rush to retake the cash register from their daughters. Others shake hands and pray. Abu hears "I hope your Aunt Simone gets better," "Al hemdu" "May Allah watch over Mira's new family and bring her many children", as he exits.

Outside, Rabi is smoking a cigarette to the end. He lights another. "Did you see the Tabqa Dam video? Bismillah, what a fire!"

"Am I a sick fuck or was that the greatest. Brother Letts was knocking off heads like dandelions!"

"Ah yeah. And those were fucking, military heads, trained by Americans. Listen mate. If you can keep clear of trouble there, I want you and Tola to come with me."

"Yeah mate? I know, well, jihad in Belgium, Paris, all over America, London tonight."

"Right, at the drag track."

"Gotta have some fun, right?"

"Do you still want to sell your car, because I know a buyer in Paris. Thirty-thou."

"Pounds?"

"Is this fucking Paris man? Yes pounds."

“Alright alright. I'll think about it.”

“And another propagandist scandal against Brother Mullagatwani. Same old honey trap. The only way to bring down powerful people is with drugs or girls. See you tonight mate.” They clasp hands at waist level.

Rabi and Abu met in Saint George and couldn't help running into each other until they eventually became friends. They've both fallen down the Islamist rabbit hole online. The Algorithm sent them videos like, *The state of the Ummah* and *her brothers called her Khanesaa* and suddenly they're exposed to this new spectrum of content that's not only informative but also really entertaining, with different creators bringing their own viewpoints to this giant group of people in the comments section. They laugh at government officials being turned away from their own offices and kicked out of village mosques. Before long these videos, subtitled in English, French or German feel like a rebellion against authority, national identity, and society as a whole. They were still young enough for teenage rebellion. They started shouting *Kafir* at kids with beer cans. There was an extremist inflation in the anonymous chat rooms that they'd be invitations to join. Lots of people had been talking about this new *Dawal* for a while now; an uncorrupted proto-government where anything was possible. This huge group of people were learning Arabic, and sharing new viewpoints they hadn't been exposed to in their families, nations or cultures. It was Zion and everyone had an idea about the Islamic State. Everyone's expertise was valuable. Those who'd ventured to elevate Shariah over Common law in neighborhoods in England found a reason to leave.

Abu quickly walks towards the tall, concentric rectangles that hem in the front door. Inside he looks down at the patterns on the wall-to-wall carpet. As he ambles, he traces the bold lines winding and zig-zagging over-under each other. Lines like the path of a blown-off leaf swooping back to earth rise and the vines loop and creep on frontward to the front of the mosque. The vines which branch off, terminate. He gazes, focuses and finds the one vine to the stone *mihrap* in front.

Abu saunters towards the tangled vine that terminates at the front of the mosque, towards the holy lands. Imam has finished speaking and men greet each other.

He's still a young man, one-hundred kilograms with thirty-centimeter biceps of college dropout. His eyes show the flesh of his being, often full, varying of shape, size, spacing, direction and color. Contrast, brilliance, brightness, sensation, balance and symmetry function as motion in Abu's eyes and when he got excited, they would well up with moisture. His forearms and upturned hands show a lighter tone to his dark face. He sits next to a young man with his palms up on his thighs and says, “...when God calls and we're obliged to answer.”

Long before he dropped out of university, Koranic studies here had guided him. He matured to find meaning in it and between its lines. He seeks to judge people, especially those who would suggest a caliphate cannot exist. If he was a punk you'd say he went straight edge. Mullah Mulligatawny trained his mind and the old guard at Summo's taught him to throw, dodge and take punches. These are Abu's lodges. Countless idle nights were spent 12 meters under the blue and pink, neon car park sign.

Now men shake hands, their sins falling like autumn leaves.

Throughout their adolescence, Abu and Tola would drink vodka from plastic bottles. Tola'd say “Ey man, sniff these white girls”, or “Ey Mate, hit the spliff why not?” Tola is smaller, louder and more focused. Summo's was his lodge too but he didn't fight, last of anyone Abu. He'd hold his pads on Friday nights waiting for the two blonde receptionists to clock out. Then he'd rev up his Vespa with some of the other neighborhood speed freaks. The chicks would wink from behind bleached plaits, boost up and whistle at a young Abu and his younger crew. When their dates pulled into the littered car park, teenaged Tola and his squad would follow them hos' date's shiny Jaguar half way to South-End

on the Sea, hooting and hollering and grabbing their dicks.

Tola keeps his collarless shirt buttoned up in the East London Mosque. His pants bunch up at the waist as he bends and bows, sits with his back straight and feels absolution in his neck, softens. He prays 's on the dole, but who isn't? He used it for a 3-D printer which he does auto-detail under the table. Abu does engine work.

Throughout his life, Tola bought faster and faster bikes. He sold grass strictly for business but he dipped his little spoon on the weekends. He and Abu both stopped drinking. By the time he converted to Sunni Islam he'd flirted with dozens of faiths. Once a month, and he took it seriously. He found the peace of a man who knows God. His family, Smith used to work on the ferry to Holland. He met Zionists from Suriname in Rotterdam, but when he got back home he stumbled upon a Jehovah's witnesses court. After seeing the general English public as potatoes while he watched them listen to his pitch on heaven, he gave up but later wore the same white shirt with The Nation of Islam, who schooled him on Coloniel abuse and the stink of Empire. He was happy to attended services at Armenian, Greek, Coptic, Russian, Ethiopian, and Georgian Orthodox churches for the next seven years and even turned with Sufi Dervishes.

That's the history that his tattoos tell. King Joseph expands into a pastiche featuring Amharic verses, all manner of crosses, ankhs, and Celtic knots, Malcolm X, Haile Salessie, Jesus, angels, hands praying, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba coupling between a pride of lions, verses, surahs, Inri, amen and bismillah. Sometimes, they jumped off his his pale skin while he rode shirtless under his ball helmet moving powder and pills, often just ahead of the DEA. It was a lucrative sin that made him enough money to partner in to an auto-body repair and detail shop and get his friend Abu an apprenticeship too. He worked with custom resin molded frames. He crafted and sold a fortune, charging twice as much as a competing auto shop that used 3D printers. Tola, whose mother and father owned a few horses in Stoak-Newington, whose grandparents were gardeners in Enfield, whose great-grandparents caught foxes in Cheshunt, hated his parents as they hated theirs. Each generation traveled a short distance and a rural demarcation away, each pushing towards London on sharp acquisition until Tola. He made hundreds of thousands of pounds on these Arabs, selling coke and fixing their wrecks. He also completely neglected to pay taxes to protest imperialism.

A familiar group of scholars and students gather near the Imam's pulpit. A white bearded elder with shameless, bright eyes approaches them smiling. He's dressed in a white shirt, a white lace skullcap and baggy grey pants. He bids Abu, "My son, could you bring that Quran to the ground?" His name is Mullah Anjem Mulligatawny and he was once the imam of this mosque. He lost his position twice; once for encouraging antisemitism and again 20 years later in a sex-trafficking scandal. He motions towards the stained glass vector circle behind a bookshelf containing many volumes of Hadith and an open Koran resting on a pedestal atop the porte piazza.

Abu obliges, and sets the book on the carpeted floor. The men sit in a semi circle with the youngest in the middle. More boys are ushered front and center to listen. Abu sits with his palms up.

Mullah Mulligatawny begins with greetings and prayers, then asks the children, "Who freed Allah's people from the Pharaoh?"

"Hazreti Musa" they race to reply.

"Correct my sons. Moses spread Allah's wisdom to his folks. And who was even more knowledgeable than him?"

One of students blurts out, "Prophet Muhammad, sallallahu alayhi wa salaam."

"Indeed our prophet is knowledgable. The extent of the prophets' knowledge are unknown. But

the Holy Koran speaks of one who knew Musa. In Surah 18, verse 65, this man is called, *one of our slaves whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.*"

"Who is this?"

"..."

"Well, neither did Musa. But one of the Israelites asked, 'O messenger of Allah, is there another man on earth more learned than you?' Moses said no, but Allah rebuked him, saying that one man could not know everything, nor would one messenger alone be the custodian of all knowledge. There would always be another who knew more. Moses asked, 'O great Allah, Tell me his name, that I might seek wisdom.' So, Allah told Moses to bring a salted fish on a wandering journey and not to eat it. Moses ordered a servant to pack a light sack and he retrieved a dried fish from his storerooms. They set off into the desert, through forests and over hills. After many days travel they laid down to rest at a dusty river junction. In the night the servant awoke to see the salted fish come to life and jump into the water. He presumed he was dreaming and returned to sleep. The next day the servant told his master about his dream, Moses halted and checked to see that the salted fish was missing. 'Ah! The sign I was waiting for,' Moses said with excitement. He sent his servant packing and retraced his steps to the river delta but when he returned, he couldn't believe his eyes. New saplings and shrubs had grown and green vines were wrapping their tendrils around their branches. At the water's edge sat a man, cloaked and praying. 'Peace be upon you,' said Moses. The mysterious man said, 'Peace?' A lingering silence passed as he sat cloaked. 'Is that how people greet each other in your land?' Moses replied, 'I am the God's Prophet, founder of the tribe of Israel.' Khidr snapped, 'I know you shepard prophet, and I know your divine tablets.' Khidr calmed and queried, 'Why seek me?' Moses replied, 'As a teacher. I seek to accompany you and to learn what I don't know.' The cloaked man immediately responded, 'The essences of our knowledge are divergent. I will upset your sensibilities and your impatience will bother me.' Moses was emphatic, 'I will follow you as a student and I promise to obey your every command.' Khidr pondered and replied, 'You may accompany me on the condition that you remain silent.' Moses agreed and sent his servants away. He began following al Khidr as a disciple. They walked three days in silence along the sea and came to a nearly abandoned harbor with a sturdy boat at the dock. Moses followed al Khidr when he greeted the crew as friends. He requested permission for them to board and ride with them. A short time later a sparrow was flitting around, dipping and drinking the water. 'O Moses, our combined knowledge is no more than a sparrow's drink in Allah's waters.' Suddenly al Khidr took a board from the ship and pulled it loose. Water slowly but steadily trickled through the leak. 'Do you mean to drown the crew whom you greeted as friends?' Moses asked indignantly. 'Ah, the morning hasn't even passed and already you've forgotten your promise.' As they disembarked Moses' nose curled in disgust. He regarded his master's deed as evil and they walked on in silence. Then they arrived at a village and found some young boys playing. Al Khidr stops, singles out a boy, calls him over and kills him with a rock. Moses shouts, 'Indeed you're actions are evil.' 'You have already outpaced my expectations as a student.' Now Moses snaps back, 'I promise to be the one to turn back if I should break my silence again.' The master and disciple were hungry and tired but found no comfort because the villagers were miserly and paranoid. The travelers were shuttered out of the windows. Al Khidr, intent on some mysterious purpose, came across a fallen wall and began to repair it. Moses watched silently as he gathered the rocks, mixed the minerals for cement and started . When the repairing the stone wall, they left the village. Moses spoke a third and final time out of frustration, 'You're mad! You sabotage your friends boat and kill a child but volunteer for undeserving people who wouldn't even give us a drink of water. I wanted to learn your wisdom but you've shown-' 'The time,' al Khidr cuts him off, 'has come for you to go back to your tribes.'

Ahem—" Anjem asks the circle, "What do we think was the lesson of al Khidr to Moses? And what does this story teach us?"

“I believe al Khidr and Moses are both limited by humanity.”

“It teaches us the value of patience Anjem Hodja. I think Moses missed an opportunity to be a greater prophet than he was.”

“Anjem Hodja, Allah told Moses that al Khidr was the wisest, so by questioning al Khidr’s wisdom, was he questioning the wisdom of Allah, which is a great sin.”

Anjem continues, “Moses left, flummoxed and perturbed. He walked back alone and came to a fishing harbor and was shocked to see the same friendly shipping crew he'd crossed the water with. Moses apologized and took out some money but the crew refused it and praised his wisdom. 'An evil and plunderous king with a big navy was strong-arming and stealing any seaworthy ship that floated nearby. They looked at our sinking boat and left it. We easily repaired it and now, we are the only ship at sea, and catching more fish than ever!' Moses then understood that Khidr’s connection to Allah was made from a different fabric than the hero of Israel. Allahu akbar!”

“Allahu akbar!”

The youngest student asks, “But teacher, why did al Khidr kill that boy? And why did he repair the wall?”

“You insolent fool!” he snaps. “How dare you question with impunity. Are you blind, illiterate or just too stupid to read? Haven't I told you, this tale comes directly from the Noble Koran itself? Tell me it's your first time hearing it? You’ve learned nothing of the personal quest for knowledge. Wait for your next beating and pray that the hours between now and then stretch long enough for you to finish your assignment before your fingertips swell black and blue! Incompetent student.”

Abu winks and blinks at Tola. One eye drifts, the other one gapes large. He rubs them, takes out a set of wooden prayer beads, and carelessly whips them against the fist they are clenched in. Tola looks up at Abu, his voice is low and expressive, “And as for the boy, he was a pagan and his parents were true believers. We feared that he would pressure them into defiance and disbelief. Surah sixteen, al Kayf. It's from the cave. Al Khidr killed the boy because he was going to corrupt his parents.”

Chapter 4 The Unification of Tangankiya and Zanzibar

In Tanzania, it was more than one hundred tribal units which lost their freedom; it was one nation that regained it.” -Julius Nyerere-

After centuries of colonialism, African nationalism ignited a revolution on the Swahili coast and the Sultanate's hegemony was overrun in Stone Town. In the heat of the night, January 12th, 1964, revolutionaries from the Afro-Shirazi party joined with the banned Umma party. Before morning broke, they'd forced open police stations, airstrips and the Sultan's palace. The exploited masses claimed revolutionary rule over Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam and the newly independent East African nation of Tanganyika. Centuries of Portuguese gold miners, Nazis, English warmongers, Omani iconoclasts, Indian dealers and other colonists has been driven out. The economics of slave and spice trade was confronted with a viable opposition. Arabs and Indians were slaughtered in the streets. Europeans and Americans were evicted and deported. The revolutionaries established new courts. Waves of nationalism followed. President Nyerere's *ujamaa* socialism, and the Tanzanian Shilling narrowly avoided hyperinflation. Within a month, order returned to the streets.

Mbito was a young boy when his father and the revolutionaries helped massacre thousands of people. Jubilant visitors came to his home in the months that followed the revolutionary action to talk about Marx and Guevara and drink scotch sometimes. They would gather around the radio in the evenings to hear Nyerere speak, "*The African is not 'Communitistic' in his thinking; he is -- if I may coin an expression -- 'communitary'.*" Henceforth Tanzania, port and country, would be independently ruled by a single-party revolutionary council.

Coffee traders avoided Tanzanian tariffs and docked in Mombasa. Inside of dark storerooms in deep catacombs, saltpeter crystallized on barrels of old cloves and banged in phantom explosions. The economy was already in depression. Many traders in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, lost their jobs and resigned to a humble village life, but there were now better schools and more opportunities to trade.

Mbito was educated communitarily. As a boy he began working at the docks. At a young age he was given responsibilities and power. He made money and savored his life. He would get his hands on foreign products, music and even currency until he was caught by police selling a Madonna poster to a friend. He was sent to jail for a month. On the third day inside he wept, cursed his family and came to terms with his crime. He was playing mancala with his cellmate when his father came to bail him out. Before that he spent three long nights listening to radio stations and he spent the days trying to call people. In jail he explored the telephone, talking to anyone and saying rude jokes. The first night after he returned home he was thrashed with a rolling pin and threatened with boiling water, "This music is pornography, bow your head to the dollar! Or or or... Kiss the feet of the Sultan when you look at this! Don't ever, *never* let it in our country again!"

He was forgiven and allowed to return to work. Forthwith, he checked the scales to the digit. He inspected the quality and sealed packages of coffee, sesame seeds and tobacco with the national insignia; a man and woman building a shrine of tusks over a shield decorated with regional flags and traditional weapons atop Kilimanjaro- looking more like an anthill- with the words *Uhuru na Umoja* Freedom and Unity. He proudly sealed tax-paid import products with a holographic tape.

Chapter 5 Duygu

In a mostly empty flat, a woman's desultory voice bounces down dark halls with high ceilings. It's an old Kylie Minogue song, "Should I shout for rescue... uh oh oh oh, don't let go, two hearts... forever, I'm in love, I'm in love, Is this for ever and ever?" All the lights are off save for ten bare bulbs arched over a mirror on a vanity set. Brown boxes stack precariously on furniture in the front room. The curtains are dark, heavy and let only a flicker of light and motion through from the West End.

Duygu's finishes her eyes in the vanity mirror and unscrews a bottle of red lip-gloss. She puckers and swabs it around oval lips. A playful smile swings from her round, high cheekbones. Wide almond eyes set below smoothly rounded temples, over an arching nose and under which an upper lip quivers with attitude reflect. She feels beyond her vanity. Boxes are rustled. She considers her anatomy lessons and remembers the philtrum, *a vestigial medial depression between the nose and upper lip. On humans it has no apparent purpose.* The longing for familial love makes it quiver. She's thrilled to be going home tomorrow. *It's just this fingertip sized saddle in the middle of our faces. But on dogs it's a moist groove that helps them have this amazing sense of smell.* Her patience is strained and she sheds a tear. *Jewish legends say that's where we're touched by angels within the womb as they command us to*

keep their secrets. She really doesn't like going long periods away from her family. *I notice that some students here have got it pierced.* Recognition of herself as vanity is as disarming as baked goods. *We certainly can't practice medicine in England with those kinds of facial accessories.*

She grabs her purse, throws in the lip gloss and runs outside to her familiar street. 2 blocks up she's meeting Abu, the boy from Saint George. He dropped out sophomore year but randomly texted her last week. She decided to let him take her out, what's to lose? Later at Club Swag with all her girlfriends, she'll really try him on. She whips out her phone to see his message *a night at the races?* and a picture of Piccadilly Circus.

She replies, *u there now? If you're dressed good enough we can go up to Leicester later.* She continues on down the staircase.

The night falls and Abu's sitting in the front seat of his Alfa Romeo Giulia. He grabs his mobile and scrolls through the address book to text bouncers, club owners and bartenders. Duygu's message interrupts like a butterfly on his face. Abu's out of his car and she's leaning against a tree. She steps up, "hello hello" and jumps up for a hug. She hangs from his neck for a second and gives him a little kiss on the cheek. She's wearing a tight black and white dress, tall boots and a lavender fur coat. Abu notices her curves, squints and inaudibly mouths "sexy bint".

Abu's never seen her in night clothes. In fact, he hasn't properly seen her smokin ass since college. They took a sociology class- one of the few he ever took seriously- but it was too late. When he started working at the shop, he lost game with most of the college girls he'd known. She always returned his messages. After class he used to come by and try to get her to come out but she was always in the library. For the first time since college Abu sees himself in her... future.

He's swallows his lust down to bend and kiss her on the cheek. After pleasantries, he opens the door to his Alfa Romeo. It's blue with A&W glittering under the streetlight.

"Nice car"

"You wanna see it hit a hundred in four point five?"

"OK," capriciously, "just not in the West End, alright?"

"C'mon, let's go to the quarter mile track. It's in North Kensington."

"But, that's like an hour away."

"Is it now?" he diverts a glance right before threading the needle into heavy traffic on Regent street, speeding down Pall Mall onto Marlborough Road. Before ripping past Buckingham Palace on the A4, he flickers the car alarm, the vehicle ahead of him pulls into the left lane and he speeds ahead. Whilst passing through affluent London, inbound traffic was heavy but his road is clear as they drive out through the parks district.

She announces, "I heard you were a junkie for a while."

He interjects, "That's bullshit. I'm a Muslim"

"..."

"Did you believe it?"

"Do you think I'd be here if I believed it?"

"So is this the chance?"

She exhales sharply. "A chance at what?"

“The one I've been asking for since Saint George. Girl, we go way back. Do you know the first time I ever texted you was on a flip phone?” he holds a lingering smile with gumdrop eyes.

“Haha, is that right? Well don't get the wrong idea, I'm a Muslim too.” Abu's still staring at her. She laughs and cracks the window as headlights blur by, “I think you should watch the road Loverboy.”

A bit later they pull onto a street on a ridge. At the end there's an empty industrial park with an empty lot in front of a boarded-up factory. A long tar-streaked pavement runs flat between the two hills. A dozen people splash beers around cars with bass heavy techno music blasting. A few cars have open hoods that people gather around.

Abu rolls past slowly and mumbles out the window, “I'm deadly on the quarter mile.” Some of the men turn their noses up. Abu laughs and hollers jovially at another group. “Ay mates, ya know your boy's good for a laugh. C'mon who wants to take on my whip today? I want that spot son, gimme your ear son.” He slows and pulls a silver revolver from under the seat. Duygu gasps. “Don't worry. I'm not doing dirt tonight. It's just the starting gun.”

Outside, a man in a rubber suit gyrates with a magnum of champagne and a camera crew sets up a tripod at the finish line. A guy in a tux swings the trophy chain encrusted with glass jewels.

Abu takes both hands off the wheel. “Here,” he takes Duygu's hand and reaches the other under the seat auspiciously. He pulls out a small white box and thuds it heavily into her hand. “Hold that.” He opens it and takes out a thirty-eight shell. Duygu's libido is like a closed fist but she chuckles a bit. Click clang, go in three out of six. “It will turn, and every other shot will blast. You want to mash the pistol?”

Thoughts race through Duygu's mind. The police are likely flat roofing and can't be arsed with races in Croyden. Her left eye looks up to meet him. She grabs Abu's bicep and feels the pistol with the other hand running across the cylinders and hammer. Abu's spine tingles to the base and beyond. She nods and guides the piece into her purse, “What the hell, gimme the gun.”

As they get out, other cars growl around the bend. There's a low-rider that's wheels keep spinning after it stops, Jeeps with spotlights on roll-rails, classic cruisers and more than a few Jaguars on the tar streaked track. There is a group of girls in a photo session and Duygu joins in, chatting vividly.

Abu steps up to his crew. Tola's bare arms show off his tattoos and dozens of gold rings. He's deepening his voice to boast about his motorcycle's balance. Rabi's Arabian chic with a short cigarette and tailored trousers. His beard is so thick, black and trim it could've been drawn on with magic marker. Abu looks through the group of friends and says, “What's up fellas? I just want you to know, that you can count on me.”

“Thanks mate,” chirps Tola, “but that sounds like butter, and you're looking for a roll.”

“Wait and see. If it goes right, I'm not sitting bitch.”

Rabi declines, “Mate, you ain't bet your arse. Bitch sits, as bitch does. The way I see it, you've got to earn yourself that seat.”

Abu knows he'll be stuck with the dirty jobs and heavy lifting anyways. He bargains, “I'll sell you the truth for a good story.”

One girl's immediately suspicious of Duygu. Noticing who she arrived with she chides, “Oh is you a bad bitch? Are you gonna listen now or later?” Fur boots stomp over to lay a finger on Duygu who pulls out the magnum and pushes the trifling ho to the pavement with her chain stitch purse.

Hands up, “Back the fuck off me ho, and watch me on the line. Hey!” she belts out, “Who's

first?”

“Ehhh piss yourself”, from a sat down position.

Drivers share last glares and pull up to the start line where Duygu is already standing with the gun held high.

“Ready,” the car engines putter.

“Set,” everybody looks to the windshield.

“Go!” Duygu blasts the cap.

Two cars speed off at evens. As she turns, Abu catches Duygu's little body in a hug and they walk together down the track. He stands close behind her and reaches over to grab his pistol back.

“Good shot puppet.” barely over the din of motors.

“Puppet?! Oh maybe you got me wrong, you're not stuffing your hand, or anything else!”

“Yo,” he rubs his eye and looks around with the other one, leans forward and says, “Give me the damn gun.”

“Oh I see. Now I’m the crazy bitch with the gun and I’m supposed to calm down. If you wanna take me out, show me what you’ve got. All night, people are throwing eyes at you. You must have a hell of a rep. You got this car, you can drive fast, you bring me out here to show me who you are. Let's see. And if your ride’s got speed, you can drive me to the club after. And take your stupid gun,” she shoves it in his pocket.

“Damn, everybody's stretching me out tonight.” Abu tilts forward as Rabi approaches, tucked in.

“Hey man,” Rabi grips his shoulder and yells into his ear, “Man! You want to race tonight?”

“Yeah, I’m bound to. Let me see the list?” Abu grabs the clipboard from the tuxedo clad emcee. It's full pairs until two a.m. “My gun got no clip but this board’s full clip,” he snaps the clip “b-dididididiDamn,” they walk on.

“I have written my name already.”

Abu checks again, “Rabi you’re on race 3! I want that spot.”

“It is not free.”

“Oh? And who are you gonna beat in a Rover?” He looks at the list of names “Here we are. *Replicobra*? Slow loser against Alfa. Listen mate, I’ll race for you and I’ll be your Romeo. I’ll give you 20 percent.”

“Keep your winnings, but pay the entrance fee back if you lose. There are higher ceilings. And a lot more money to be earned for both of us. Do you remember what we talked about on Tent Street?”

“What? When the little girl smelled poo? Sure, The IS, but stifle your blackmail, I’ll race third and I’ll go of my own accord when I’m ready.”

Rabi cools his intention and calls Tola into the conversation.

“This is more than fast cash, but tell me tonight if you're ready to make ten-thousand easy quid.”

Abu's circular eyes flatten. “I don't know man, I'm running up the wall here. I'm not looking for chump change with kafirs.” Tola's ear's drawn in and he jumps off his bike.

"Drive with me... a delivery... for my uncle."

"A job for an Arab, alright maybe. Where? And why do you need us?"

"This isn't a job brothers. This is a life. We're going to Rakka, and I wouldn't offer it to anyone else. *Al Khalifa*. At the end of the night. It's four days drive. There's war there, but more importantly, there's work. Rebuilding the eternal." Rabi pulls a shining coin out of his pocket, "This is the premier Islamic currency. Pure gold. A standard that can never devalue. Listen mates, however hard you've ever had to scrap for a few quid here. You'll make the same wage just living your life. Mechanics, teachers of hand-to-hand combat, doctors, they're all state subsidized so you just keep the engines running. Your wages are two thousand pounds a month with no expenses. Rent, food, wheels, all paid for. I've already set up a new bank account to access and send money all over the world. I can set up two more right now over the phone, and wire you five-thousand pounds each. Or take it in gold."

"I hate the fucking pound. Not for money, or the good life," he stands straight and puts both hands up in prayer, "I'll going for the glory of Islam." He slumps back down and laughs. "How was that? Am I ready to be a mujahiddin?" The corner of his eyes sharpen.

"I hate the pound too, but I love gold. I have one question, I saw people burning their passports."

"That's voluntary, but you won't want to leave. Everyone takes an alias and no one knows who's actually there." Tola curls his lip up and starts to protest. "OK, you twisted my arm. I'll give both of you the five-ounce bonus that I get for bringing you. Tola, you're my mechanic and Abu, you're my body guard."

"Wait a minute. Five ounces of gold?"

"Pure. Just to support the troops."

Chapter 6 Sailor Man

The date was February of 1984 and an old Russian whaling vessel was approaching Stone Town. Inside one of its two cargo holds sit fifteen heavy metal boxes made from corrugated steel, the industry standard. Known as *intermodal freight containers*, the product could be transferred from ship to train to truck without breaking bulk. More often than not they were full of chips, candy bars, fizzy drinks and various other junk from America. In a dark cargo bay, a man in an open vest held a clipboard and approached them squinting to read their ID numbers off a printed label no bigger than a peanut.

"L... S... G...O... no, that's a U. One-oh-seven, seven-three-seven... How could these huge boxes make work easier?" He asked the rats in the darkness. "They're heavy, awkward and the machines to lift them are even heavier and more awkward!" For such a man, no less of a name than Simbat.

In the corner, a pile of old sacks were stacked on a cart. He flops down on them and rests his eyes. Old dust diffused into a dream of the first time he sailed into Zanzibar Port as a scrub deckhand. Young Simbat was breaking bulk for port of entry and the captain was shouting, "Maize in the front corner, shift that Ceylon tea back. Now!", like some kind of scurvy slaver.

At Zanzibar Port with sacks of corn and seeds, Young Simbat, with earrings of less precious

metal, finished hauling the goods off the ship. Afterwards he leaned against a wall, crossed his arms against his broad chest and closed his eyes a moment. He immediately heard a loud voice bark, "Get to work! I need to a full inventory within the hour."

"Yes sir," he straightened his disposition and followed the serious looking man down a corridor into a dimly lit store room.

The official, dressed like a customs control officer, pushed up his glasses and started counting sacks. Simbat leaned back up against a wall, waiting with empty hands for orders from this important local official. When the orders didn't come, he occupied those empty hands by whipping prayer beads against them. The official heard the noise, looked back and said, "Who are you? What ship do you come on? Why aren't you working?"

"I work for the Sultan of Oman and all the sacks are loaded."

"Simbat of the Sultanate," he laughed at the brazen deceleration and lowered his eyebrows, "Well, if your Sultan could see you now, would he think you were working hard enough?"

Simbat half understood, replied, "Yes yes, Sultan Sayeed, very good. Very rich!".

"Does your Sultan have many ships?" intrigued.

"Yes, a hundred, maybe. And warships."

"Oh ha! don't bring those here."

"What is your name?"

"Mbito, and I am the Order General."

"Very nice to meet you O.G. Mbito."

He showed the pins on his lapel. Simbat, back on land after ten months was happy to chat with this talkative and friendly man. In the off seasons, they spent time learning each other's languages. As a young sailor, Simbat thought mostly about stipends and whores but Mbito helped spark ambition. He looked at inventory, memorized prices, feigned admiration and repaired ships. They both sought mutually beneficial trade.

Simbat woke up on the dusty old sacks with the monkey nuzzled in his arm. He went back to dream of how he became Captain. Sahip Sindhibaatr, an elderly shipping mogul from Thatta deserved a retirement was appropriate for a pious, middle-aged family man. Simbat, ostentatiously impious, knew some Bedouins. He met Sahip in the dinghi. While reeling up the 15 meter hull, Sindhibaatr said that he was a father of eleven and was always terrified of at least one of his wives. Simbat, laughing in that dinghi, recognized a windfall. He later approached Sahip Sindhibaatr with a gentle confidence and hidden intentions. "Let me see photos of your family. How fortune they are. That is the reason you spend eleven months a year at sea. To establish a legacy?" The con was long, difficult and based of intuition. Sindhibaatr had just picked up another wide ship, powered by diesel and sunlight, but that meant he had one too many. Simbat had chump cash, so he bought some American flags and rented a small boat. He got an actor to impersonate a member of the US Navy. People were always chasing him down at ports to burden the old mogul with procedural bureaucracy. Bribes were paid to the wrong people but when the Persian gulf started to fill up with American ships, Simbat figured no one would know the difference and forged a lien against the ship he'd been working on. He sailed up and served it to them, said it had been stolen by the Russians in the Koran war.

Sindhibaatr was at the helm of another ship. He made him consider changing allies, or at least asking his lawyer. He was well versed in the changing standard of wet law. But he'd never taken his hadj, and he was starting to suffer vertigo. "Perhaps a few months on land would do me well." "You

might go with my assistance,” Simbat said. A noble tribe of Bedouins, once made me their honor. Please allow me to honor them by brokering your family's *hadj*.”

Sindhibaatr considered but quickly refused. He said, “There's too much work to be done. My ships will be seized by the empire.” Next he received a letter from the Sultan. He busting through the wax seal with his gold letter opener. Under the crest of the sultanate it read, *Sultan Said bin Taimur of Oman, Son of Muhammad, brother of the Sun and the Moon. Sovereign of sovereigns.* He skipped a few lines. *...your fleet has grown to exceed the protection of the Sultanate and its passages at Hormuz and Suez can no longer be sponsored.* Sindhibaatr threw his hands up. He called Simbat into his office and said, “Your offer for my family is most gracious. I accept, but there are three dozen family members, who are used to living like royalty.” So it was that Simbat paid for a band of Bedouins two years salary to take Sindhibaatr, his elderly parents, four wives and eleven children, three more children from previous marriages, four siblings, eight nieces and nephews, and fifty-one camels two-thousand miles across Arabia. Despite the cost, Simbat considered it an honor gift and painted *Mashallah* across the stern. Sindhibaatr, returned spiritually fulfilled and never returned to sea.

Simbat turned a sharp profit in his first year, trading between East Africa, India and Arabia. The cargo holds were always full of coffee, textiles, fish, vegetables or whatever trade goods were available. He outfitted the communications tower with a new radar. The next year he procured a 20-year old, mil-mi-6 helicopter from a Soviet black market auction and armed it with two missile launchers. He recruited zealous men from West Indian and East African fishing villages and they chased long loneliness away with fantasies and jokes- *The whores here are tighter than clams, and three times as fragrant* -as they passed from port to port and got to know them. Simbat would hoist, deal and drink as much, and they all wasted time betting on cat fights, singing, drinking, diving into the sea and shooting weapons. Whiffs of tales, imagination and legends carried them out time and time again but a sea change in maritime laws, procedures and technology was starting to standardize it. Old mates told stories of pirate ports with swords out. Despite the fact there were no sails, there was a kind of crows nest, high above the communications tower, which was where Sayeed Hesham Sameer, less ambitious but more wise than Simbat, and his pet monkey Maymun had risen early to climb up to.

His earliest mentor, more like an abetting uncle than a father figure, Sayeed was twenty years Simbat's senior.

Once, when Simbat was a teenager, he fell in love at port. Sayeed helped him smuggle the girl onboard but their lovemaking was too loud and they were found. The girl was sequestered in the captains quarters and Simbat and was locked in the brig with his accomplice. It so happened that the girl was a kind of princess. While the love smugglers were locked up, their ship was waylaid by the navy of a small, but wealthy island.

As the ship was burning and going down, young Simbat wailed, “We’re left to die!” He banged on the metal bars, “Hey! Captain. Let us free! ”

Sayeed replied, “No one's coming. This is all your fault, but maybe there's always a way out.” He started to jab at the panels with his elbow. “A weak link, a low picket, a loose plank or a trap door.” A panel sprang out, showing a dark rectangular gap in the high wall. The floor was starting to tilt, making the wall easier to climb. They crawled out through a vent and found a passage to the engine room. They opened a hatch and climbed into the bilge pump crawling upwards with their backs pressed against the tube. Before long they saw stars and scaled upward. Scrambling to grip the duct they scooted out of the tube just before it started rushing in with water. In the sea there were bodies among the flotsam and jetsam. The assailing ships’ wakes churned the bloody sea under the moonlight. Sayeed and Simbat strapped a panel with O rings and waited three days to be rescued by the Malaysian Coast Guard.

Realizing that he'd been asleep for the better part of an hour, Simbat hastily finished inventory and passed up through the humming steel corridors to see another clear sunrise over the water. On deck, he heard a holler, "Land Ho!", looked up to see Sayeed climbing down. "Count it! Today's the first day of Rabi al Thani"

"Not surprising who rises earliest," Simbat jested, "Did Maymun wake you up with a leak? In the morning his dick is longer than my tooth."

Sayeed glanced at his pet perched on his shoulder and said, "Hold back now Maymun, our venerable Captain is gonna try to outdo your sexual moves and we don't want old Simbat to bring back with him a case of the monkey pox."

It was too early to laugh, so they grinned slightly and kept their eyes squinted against the rising sun as the crew came on deck. "*Habari Yako!* Aakash," "Good morning Mbwana, baklava for breakfast again?" He slapped their backs. "A joke?" They whipped each other's chests with limp wrists, smiled and squinted.

"Did you hear about the boy who went the whorehouse to lose his virginity?" "The bitch took one look at him and said, 'You're too young. Go fuck a tree and come back in a year.' A year later the boy came back to fuck. The pimp looked in the room and saw him with a long stick in her cunt. He burst in hollering 'What the fuck are you doing?' The boy replied, 'Well, the last time I did this, a squirrel bit my dick so I gotta make sure it's all clear first.'" The deck roared in laughter, drowning out the engine.

"Alright," said Simbat, "Stone town tonight, but tomorrow evening we'll be in Dar es Salaam. After we unload, I'm sick of your faces until the first of June."

Simbat walked with Sayeed who passed out envelopes of Tanzanian and English currency. As the savory winds of Africa blew hard against his face, he said quietly to Simbat, "The Afghans are seeding an army of Jihad. Every general in Afghanistan is looking to build a battalion and that means African slave wives."

"We owe it to the sex industry. We know it's "

Chapter 7 White Cobra

Duygu's acting the vixen and harassing the bottle gimp. The emcee picks up a microphone, "Anyone here wanna charge into the super street class? Looks like Replicobra's too slow to the starting line." Tola's motorcycle thrusts onto the back wheel and he leans back. Abu drives up to the guy in the tuxedo and calls him over. "My race is imminent. Where's the contender?"

"I don't know. I'll announce an open spot in a bit."

Duygu opens Abu's passenger side door and says, "Well, I guess that's your slow loser. Stuck in West End traffic perhaps."

"What's the buy in?" wonders a young kid

"Six-hundred wins a grand." At that moment up on the ridge, a Shelby cobra with aggravating

red headlights squeals through the gates and down the hill. It burns and smokes for a flash before ripping to the starting line where the passenger door swings opens and two women in long white dresses sashay out passenger door of the two-seater. The car revs as one of them lights two cigarettes and they split to the driver door, where a middle-aged gentleman steps out dressed like a silver-age superhero in red and white.

“Wow, so he makes an entrance. Alright big boy, show on the road, let's go.” With the door open, they laugh and hum. She says, “but don't get it wrong, win or not, it won't change my mind.” He dares a closed mouth kiss. “Cheeky”, she smiles, looks up and opens his lips with her tongue for less time than it takes to crack an egg. Abu eyes are thumping on his closed lids. She backs up to look at his face, tuts her tongue and heads up. “Have a good race.”

Audibly, the silver flake sparkles under the Cobra's red headlights on Abu's Alfa Romeo. He wants Duygu to shoot the gun but she chose to wave the flag. Abu concentrates on it and replays his race mantra. It's 60% man 40% wheels. His car is fast. Fill the mix and get rich quick. He puts the gun back under the seat and starts revving up with the car. He watches the flag fall and accelerates to the limit. The Cobra contender's tailpipes shoot flames. He's behind by a length. He flicks the turbo, kicks it into 6th, and pumps. Shwoom. Even at 120 mph, Abu keeps one eye on the Cobra as he flies past it at the finish line. He sees the win in his peripherals and comes round to celebrate his victory.

Duygu's waiting, “Looks like a tie, it only registered one finish, 14 seconds.”

“Yea maybe even...” Tola hesitates.

“It looks even, but I filmed the finish line straight on.” says Rabi.

“It even looks like the flaming pits of hell.”

“What the fuck? Let me see,” Abu splits the crowd looking at a millisecond loop of a film burning. As the cars drive past the aspect, flames consume it to the point that, when the angle shows the finish, it's just a fireball rushing through a gate, like footage of a bomb test. “Wicked!” says Duygu, trying to keep her head from reeling.

A few people who'd filmed the finish with their mobile phones see two cars blurring slightly past a black and white checkered line on the road. Most people report that Abu's Alfa Romeo snagged the victory by a hair but it's hard to tell. The race official scratches his beard, brushes the dead skin off his lapels and awards the prize to Abu. Tola pops open a smaller bottle of champagne and takes a pill out of his pocket. He pops one and offers one to Abu and Duygu who refuse. He pours most of the drink on the ground. Abu looks at Duygu and says quickly, “no strings attached puppet.”

The loser stands aloof and flanked. He's looking at his girlfriends' phone, huffing and scoffing a bit but he's a duck in a chicken coop so they drive off suddenly.

Later in Leicester Square, the winning crew watch some free, neon clad, boy band sing and dance on a flashy stage. They quickly agree it's shit and move on to the clubs. Rabi keeps an eye out for the right. To a well trained London eye, they appear harmless; sped mildly perhaps on amphetamines and compulsively posting photos that surreptitiously display them with all the glamour and excess of Piccadilly. Abu sees Jermaine outside Club Swag. Rabi's in Tola's ear like a genie, “We need a kilogram of the highest quality amphetamine.”

“On it,” and slings out his phone. Rabi peeps his password.

Jermaine's got an earpiece with a curly white cord. “Heyyy mate!” They grip right hands and bump shoulders over the velvet rope, Duygu is putting on lipstick a few steps away. “Wah gwan?”

"Naught for much," replies Jermaine, scanning the crowds, "just a gang of vexed Paraguayans inside. Hang on mate," he presses his earpiece. "I've got to run up the street."

"Everything alright?"

"Yeah yeah, just a bit of rabble at the peep show, you go ahead on." Jermaine nods to the club bouncer and trots off.

Abu says to Duygu, "Look at my man Jermaine. He does VIP services and in his ear right now, he's got a direct line to one Bob McGilicutt." The bouncer unclips a velvet rope and waves them in. They descend a dark staircase at 160 bpm. Deep bass pulsates from below.

"What makes this club great," says Duygu in the moment before Abu pushes open the heavy door, "is that you can't hear the fucking boy band outside."

Through the door, a drum break sets a timer and they weave through the throng of electronica while dancers close gaps behind them. Maroon and pink lights whip around and Duygu drags Abu past groups of girls, those whose eyes wander take notice of the notably unequal couple. They find a space in the dance floor as the bass drops and they bounce and tremble. They move like two swords clashing, and whirling until well into the night, after a slow song Duygu says, "So, it's late. Where your home? Mine is just five blocks away. You'll gonna drop me off or should I walk?"

Abu's eyes gaped and drooped, "Well, five blocks away. You might as well walk home."

Duygu's eyes narrow, "Yeah mate, good idea. I have to fly early to Istanbul. So, see ya." She turns and leaves without kissing him goodbye.

Abu stands for a moment and starts to feel the questioning eyes. He walks straight, catches the door before it shuts, and grabs the wrist. "I think you forgot something."

She's totally annoyed and stretches her face at him. "Well, what?"

Abu's blanking, blinking. He just says it, "the kiss."

"Boy, what kind of girl do you think I am? I came from a good family." Her affront nails Abu's raw nerve.

"Alright than off ya go bint. Ya slag."

She grabs a taxi. Out on the main road there's a little conglomeration on the hood of Rabi's car. "Ay mate, what happened? I just saw your biddy come out. Said she was going to the airport. How'd she switch on you?"

"Seemed more comfortable in her own dugout, anyways she's more like a mate than a bint. It's three o'clock and I guess she's really got an early morning flight to Turkey. Said she had to bring a document to the English Embassy. Anyways, I'm not bothered about it. Listen, tonight was a fit final ride. I'm ready to sell it. 30,000 pounds."

"Right mate, sell it in Paris, than get in the Range and drive the bint the rest of the way. Now's the time brothers. Two new accounts with Kuwait bank are going all the way. Believe me mates, everything makes sense."

"What's the speed for?" wonders Tola.

"It's the drug culture there. They mix it up and make a pill called Captagon. It's actually decongestant for dogs."

"Ha ah, okay."

“Who are we to talk? Everyone in London's wacked out on cat tranquilizer.”

“So what? You're gonna start popping pills?”

“Fuck off mate, I'm gonna cook it and sell it. See the Caliphate's got a problem importing, especially medical shit, even shit for dogs is made mostly in Europe or America. We're gonna smuggle it in.”

“Sounds too risky.”

“Mates don't worry about the borders, the only sketchy one is Turkey and upon entry, we have a deal with our license plate scans at the border, we'll be golden.”

“What about ISIS, don't they execute drug users?”

“For hard drugs, yea. But we consider this like coffee. Besides, this shit's been round Mesopotamia for a long longer than ISIS has. Now's not the time for a new war on drugs. Unless the Saudis withhold the cash flow.”

Suddenly a clashing chorus of loud, local voices, “Buy you a drink!” and three open cans of beer splash over them, tepid foam spraying across their tailored shirts. The white back end with aggravating red tail lights is speeding away, so they rally fast into Rabi's black Land Rover and speed off. “He's fucking dead!” “Kafir's going to hell tonight!”

Any trace of self-awareness is abandoned for the chase. Abu in the front and Tola in the back middle are jeering to follow. Both are desperate and focused for a hand on the old bastard. “First I'll get a piece of his face with this knuckle, then maybe an ear or a nose and I'll tear it right off. Then I'll put some rock or a brick right through the hole in his face, right in his fucking mouth. Than I'll stab him up and down.” The see ahead on the road, a stop light with his car idling in the clear of the intersection. -Drive up there, let's rip him apart.-

Rabi thinks and speaks, “He's baiting us. It's a fox hunt. There's surely a racist cop a few blocks up.”

“Well, fuck me. I'd have fallen right into that trap. You're too smart Rab.”

“Two can play at that.”

“Alright than roll up, real polite. Cuppa tea.” They approach the gentleman with mocking stiff upper lip swagger, miming a Victorian tea party. Him and his girlfriends are trolling with nasty sneers and rude gestures but it's a not taking. When the light turns green and the faux-bra speeds ahead, Rabi accelerate sensibly. They continue down the road watching it get getting further and further with an eagle eye on it's aggravating red taillights even when it's not braking. It turns left.

“You reckon he's going to catch the A4?”

“No fucking doubt. He's a country cunt for sure.”

“Alright than, we'll just go east around Hyde and play a little hide-and-seek.

“Right, cat and mouse. They insult us by throwing alcohol over us. It's clear to see that we must return their insult greater. Abu, have you got any bullets or is that just a replica?”

“It's no fucking replica. My dad gave me this pistol but it's a pussy magnet. I've never actually shot it. And I'm not ready to murder a guy who splashed beer over me.”

“Than just shoot out his tyre. He'll come through quickly. Good timing getting here.”

“Alright, but I haven't got a bullet.”

Rabi opens his glove box, “what's this then? Thirty-eight eh?” and takes a loose bullet.

“What the fuck you doing with that?”

“I got boxes of em. Alright then mash man, can you shoot it straight? Or should I.”

“Fuckin hell,” Abu noisily pushes air through his lips and loads the bullet in his little revolver. They park the car at the edge of the highway. “That's it, Cromwell Road” “Right across there, he's gonna pass. Take a right, Nevern Road. Alright, now pull in the back and park behind the building. It's perfect, the view, down there we can see the roundabout, on the road and right here he's gonna pass. Just shoot his car—the tyre, maybe you'll hit him in the foot and he'll have to get his dirty hoes to suck the bullets out.”

Rabi rolls his window down a crack, “And what if he doesn't pass, we're sat—look there, red replica rolling.”

It's getting on to 4 a.m. and the first loser of this story has pulled up to a red light in West London next to the white, two-seater. A replica of a classic English car. A hapless, young, motorist is lured into road games by a provocative engine rev and a couple of sultry blondes running their fingers across each other's chest, riling up their driver for what promises to be an evening of wild passion nonetheless. He grins and revs up too, but he's fucked. He wasn't Islamophobic, he was just an asshole who'd started dozens of fights and ran from hundreds. He just happened to pick up some trouble and throw beer on the wrong group of guys at the wrong time.

So he peels out at the straightaway. The accelerating thrust pushes his relatively light car with about four-hundred and fifty horsepower and about four-hundred and twenty pounds of torque and when the bullet strikes his wheel, it severs the front-left caster, wobbles the alignment, and jams the wheel turnt. The driver loses control and hops the short, embanked median strip, head-on into a yellow taxi.

Abu, Tola and Rabi watch the carnage of the crash that they engineered from less than the distance of a cricket pitch. A near perfect alignment of direct force. In an instant there's blood smeared across the intersecting windscreens and bodies pushed up against them with engine parts thrown through the taxi like buckshot, ejecting at two people through the windscreen and bludgeoning the rest against. The architects of the violence watch their effect awestruck for a moment and track each other into the collective thought -flee!-

Chapter 8 OG Mbito

20 years dedicated to this office, and for what? With each passing year, Mbito saw fewer and fewer ships sailing in. He passed the time with a two-way radio and learned that textiles from Zambia and Kenyan coffee were fetching high profits. He heard that Mujaheddin soldiers from around the world were congregating in Afghanistan. He heard that zombies in Malawi and Uganda were cracking people's heads open and eating their brains and felt proud in his great and sensible nation. Although he wanted to open the economy, he recognized that the conservative trade policy was keeping their domestic assets safe.

Mbito had matured with his nation and was tied to it. He wasn't religious or well-educated so his family values, his ethics, and his pride were with Tanzania. He was free to voice his opinions, even

though nobody in power ever never listened. He was free to say that Tanzanian products were the best that Africa had to offer, but we need more sensible tariffs to grease trade.

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, resting his