

“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 at Nevern. Alright, now pull back and park behind the building. Down there, perfect shot at the roundabout, right? He's gonna pass right there. Just shoot his car—the tyre, maybe you'll blast his foot.”

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. The road games by a provocative engine rev. He grins at his girlfriends and revs up again, but he's fucked. He was just an dickhead who started a fight and ran. He picked up some trouble and threw beer on the wrong guys.

So he peels out the straightaway and Abu squeezes the trigger. The accelerating thrust pushes his relatively light car with about four-hundred and fifty horsepower and four-hundred and twenty pounds of torque. When the bullet strikes his vehicle, it severs the front-left caster, wobbles the alignment, jams it turnt and springs the left side of the car up to flip it. It hops the short, embanked median strip and drops head-on a yellow taxi.

Abu, Tola and Rabi watch the carnage they engineered. A near perfect alignment of direct force. In an instant there are bodies pushed up against the windscreens with engine parts thrown through the taxi like buckshot. They watch, awestruck and share the collective thought -flee!-

## Chapter 8 OG Mbito

20 years dedicated to this office, and with each passing year, Mbito saw fewer and fewer ships sail in. He passed time at his desk with a two-way radio and learned that textiles from Zambia were making good profits. He heard news that Kenya was exporting hundreds of tons of coffee. Secret broadcasts spread news about Mujaheddin soldiers in Afghanistan. He also heard all the gossip of the political systems of neighboring countries, and that zombies were cracking people's heads open. Although he wanted to open the economy, he accepted that the conservative trade policy was keeping their assets safe.

Mbito had matured with his nation. He wasn't religious or cosmopolitan so his family values, ethics, and pride were with Tanzania. He was soon to see his oldest child get married. Good things were happening and he hoped to bring down tariffs by three percent. He was always encouraged by his peers who, agreed with him but enacted no change.

He straightened the items on his desk and 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.

*The Ministry of Finance is encouraging the Ministry of Trade to enact a 10% reduction on the coffee tariff. Finance Minister Kighoma Malima has said that, depending on its effect, trade liberalization could continue...*

A grin slowly spread across his face. He was about to bring his good mood to his wife. After one last look out at the harbor, he slid his chair out to get up, walk down the hall and see that his whole family were in bed together, but his wife was awake. She whispered "Dear, do you have that skin cream in your office?"

"Ah yes," his grin was inviting her to come.

She replied, "Ok first, come here and let's take off your collar." He shuffled his slippers to the side of the bed allowing the tight clasp on his white collar to loosen. It was yellow and smelled spicy.

"Thank you dear."

Suddenly the phone rang. Mbitio hummed as he shuffled to his study. It was the governor of the Iringa region, "Bad news," he delivered. "Bandits have 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 ends on food. There is no coffee, no tobacco, no gold neither. And there is famine. We cannot even reach the villages or build roads."

A few more of Mbitio's hairs turned grey. He needed to take action *and* call others to it but Tanzania only had one rescue helicopter.

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, a day Mbitio ruled. He told the Governor he would call him.

"What about the national guard? Was there a reserve in the region?" after a long pause.

"No the lake shore across from the mountains is too far away but it was invaded. 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 Iringa farm a little coffee."

Mbitio 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 Jonathan.

"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 a step away. We're protecting our villages."

"All of them? Sir, the bandits are only a garrison. They have military vehicles and weapons. They're not to be trifled with. If there Malawian and there's no cabinet, then they're acting independently from Banda or Neyere."

"How dare you use their names together like that!"

"Both are able to stop this, but neither will. I suggest we cut off the serpent's head before it grows another."

"Military action in 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.

"Mister Kighoma Malima, allow me to be brief. Rogue soldiers from Malawi have raided our villages. I've just had a talk with the Governor and then a conversation with General Jonathon. I understood that we will not respond."

"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! He leads a military that could invade and breach their capitol in two weeks!!" 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."

"I might know some but, can we work with Jonathan?"

"Maybe, 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 this information and at least a million shillings need to dissolve. 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 at the hips, sideways!”

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

“Coffee please.”

Mbito paused and slumped like a wind up toy that needed a crank. He straightened himself back up in his chair, and smiled. He was pensive. He silently 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. Simbat's parents probably lived here before the revolution. Now he's asking them to risk their lives fighting for it and 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 encounters with pirate ships, and I am comforted to say that nothing has changed. It's always going to be cheaper to send goods into the Mediterranean and the pirates will thrive in the open waters again. The Sultanate of Oman is pleased to see lower tariffs this season. You must be proud! Your life of hard work is good for Tanzania and world.”

“There's a problem. As we reopen up our gates, we are stabbed in the back. Simbat, I'm sorry to say that the price of coffee will be double.”

“Don't talk of prices. What's this invasion?”

“Yes Simbat, the inner borders are swarming with bandits and there's a stall on our military. 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? Well you made the right choice."

"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. I have to recruit an army. My helicopter can host three pregnant hippos, and it too'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 can fight, but we're not soldiers. So, if I can recruit mercenaries, we will accept."

"Ok my friend." They stood up, "I understand you're calling in Dar es Salaam tomorrow. I will contact you over the radio in the morning. Is 8 o'clock alright?" They shook hands. Simbat left O.G. Mbito's office, walked down three flights of stairs onto the port, Zanzibar's oldest settlement.

"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 pinapples, 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 a dozen 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. At shore leave his crew are given large stipends and they always 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 gripped her belly and 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 expert timing of his arrival at Officer General Mbiti's port didn't escape him. He was a free captain and it would be both profitable and ethical to defend the innocent. If he'd known however, what I know—which is who would intertwine his story line with those underfoot bandits and brokers who trample—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.*

After much consideration from her uncle, it was decided that she must leave her family. She also knows sensitive details about Jihad and would likely be arrested and tortured by Interpol. The Caliphate will benefit from her life stories and will stoking her vanity. She will exemplify the role with confidence to accept the link between love and death. She will inspire women across the Islamic world to raise a new generation. 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, through 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 Muslims in the Caliphate will praise her *sunah*. Parisians oppress real Muslims 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 will she sit under those 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. Her eye is first drawn to the Arab, tailored to precision in front. Clearly the leader of the three and to put it bluntly, the handsome man she's ever seen. She imagines herself on a horse holding him tightly from behind, her heavy breasts pressed against his fierce and muscular back while he swings a sword against the necks of hapless soldiers.

She panics, feeling immense guilt and self-consciousness. Have they greeted her? They're silent now, looking blankly. Allah, she thinks, and swoons. Her consciousness fades. Her body slumps forward into Rabi's arms. As eyes roll back she catches a vision of Abu's red and white globes loosely set in his black face. His eyes fall out sideways, separating and turning back together like two fighters.

Horrors, demons and genies close in on her. Hayat's world is crashing down around her. Not coincidentally, a new world is being raised, miles away. As the widow of a martyr, she will be courted by many men, and will 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 young, 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."

Inside her house it reeks of condolences and used tissues. Tola picks up a bright laptop with an calligraphic e-card, but scoffs and puts it down. "I can't read this. Rabi, you know Arabic right?"

Rabi snatches it, "It's an email." He begins to read and understand the heavy language used for religious rites, *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." She's clearly breathing but Tola checks her heartbeat anyway.

They go out for a smoke. Abu's silence cues Tola's high pitched voice, "This bint got any family here? Why are we taking her? Why'd she faint and who the fuck is she?" His questions hang in the air. The wind blows. Hairs stay unruffled. A few pedestrians pass with grocery bags in hand. Some give quick, hostile glances but Parisians are canny and unperturbed too. Hayat's building once housed both the concubines of French monarchist soldiers and revolutionaries side by side until one day, the tensions broke.

The 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. Uncle Abdul has planned this trip under beautiful weather," rhapsodizes Rabi.

"Yes, Abdul always considers. 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 Amedy and Abdul, 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."

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. Her heart aches. She holds onto glimpses of estates of wood and stone, Rustic wooden signs advertise wine with family crests. It was once her dream to spend her weekends and summers on a vineyard. 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 between the vines. Hayat's thought turn pornographic and she slowly turns her eyes towards the large stranger next to her. He's sleeping. 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 is at war here France and that perhaps, one day, she can return proudly 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 Abu and 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 maintains cool silence.

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

Abu and Tola look at each other surprised. Abu breaks the silence, "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.

"Oh come on don't make me grease my arm," assures Rabi.

Hayat's got her head outside the window and her scarf flies back and billows like a black flag. Fat sheep stare dumbly as they pass and Hayat concentrates on the scene, makes a mental picture of her abandoned dreams. 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," says Abu, but desists, due to his position, "more like a B 'n B."

"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 bald man who's other arm is fully to the elbow up inside a third man whimpering like an abandoned kitten. Another grunting duo of ebony and ivory fist fuck each other in an intimate and profane 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 roil. 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 the well-dressed man who's exited the homestead with a baseball bat in hand to catch a hit 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. Despite fist-fuckers and the sexy photo, Hayat continues to activate a reasonable respect. With every dragging second, the atmosphere presents itself less and less appropriate to a resolution.

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 under al Kathoumi. 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 Bournameddiene* Abu and Tola see him too but aren't sure if the porter notices the resemblance. He's not watching the screen when the graphic flips to an active terror alert in the North of France and images of two men, Said and Cherif Kouachi, *a piede libero*.

A moment later a boy 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 then something in Italian to the clerk. They walk past the 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 down on a courtyard 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 like shit for too long. They invade our nations and start war. Then they invite us to abandon our faith and be proper French. It's fucking disgusting, even moreso than London. Paris is target number one and now it has its spokesperson. When our girl 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 each other's shoulders and writhe into inconceivable positions, shouting "*olé!*"

Abu looks at his friend suggesting they go look for a fight. Tola, sensing that Abu might wind up fighting his way into prison, 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, taking his time on grey stone sidewalk squares. He's apologetic, "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? Can't be arsed. All in together, pity I'm stuck in too, so let's just finish the drive and do the job and I'll fuck off 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 to introduce myself. 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 monkeys that randomly 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 drank-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, His footprint in the physical world.

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 their prophecies.

The Angel 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 is ignorance of 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 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 afreetes 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 split the deed and bestowed a piece of their property to Busara; 1 *seir* northeast of the old fort and 19 *qasbahs* from the sea, the 2 cubit space between the teashop and the Hamamni gardens, is forthwith passed from Jer Bulsara to the ownership Kimof Busara. We will keep the deed to the tea shop but we bestow all of it's profits to you, and nobody will question your claim on the booth. Jer said, "We only ask you let Farokh sing his songs here in the evening."

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, which 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 surreptitious 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 day 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 troubles 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 his 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 the 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 ancient gate of a building that had been demolished.

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 river that splits the city in two. A few mid sized sky rise apartments stand over a theater on an island, featuring Debussy a hundred 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.

Often Bahtiyar fell asleep walking 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 and smoke cause more air pollution of course."

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 her she was surrounded by people but 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 nobel 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'll run the course and later we'll shoot. You're going to learn to shoot straight through the eyes of *Shaytan* and his allies around the world. *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 privilage 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 Srebznica. 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 robe. 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.

His 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

The Range rover slows down. Hayat looks out the window. Blurry red lights streak through the rain. Before funneling in at Kapıkule border crossing, he wakes up his 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 an apostate government. Friends have opened this door alone. You may be briefly 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. Not too long ago I was shackled up with this Bulgarian Broad over the border for visa-runs. I know all of these officers. We'll pass through by my grace."

"What'd you think?" Tola asks. "Did you stay long?"

"Beautiful, yeah three months I spent in Istanbul and Antalya. With the warm seas, friendly people and slow boats. I rented a car and paid the cops a couple of pounds to get out of a speeding ticket, but reallys, 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."

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.*"

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A few days earlier, on a London Avenue, Abu shouted, "Blair and his cowboy boyfriend ought to be in prison."

They were eating sunflower seeds in a crowded public square. A few days prior Rabi's uncle had just 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's 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."

"Who? Blair and Bush?"

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

Tola clears his throat, "The Ottoman Empire crumbled after World War One and Syria was partitioned to the French, right?"

"And Iraq to England" said Abu, "Palestine had no back while the Jews came back to Zion. They kept it earmarked for Euro Jews. "

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

"The Sikes-Picot agreement was after World War One. Have you heard it has been erased?"

"What's been erased?"

"The Sikes-Picot line, what became the borderline 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 earnestly grabbed passers-by attention 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. These two guys would come round for dinner, my father used to tell me it was the president and his father, he's 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.”

“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 teach the Koran all across Iraq, no matter if were Shi'ah or Ba'ath or Sunni or whatever. He wrote the curriculum to teach the Koran, non-sectarian, for fifteen years before 2003. Now he's on hit lists for supporting Shariah in Iraq.”

“Is he still alive?”

“Yeah, in France. He stole a dead man's identity and moved to Paris. He coordinates Islamic action in France and Iraq and rarely leaves his apartment. I think he's ISIS. His own family doesn't even know 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 a decade. 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?”

“Better there than here.”