



Saving Rose Green

RICHARD SHEKARI

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By Richard Shekari

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DEDICATION

To *Fat-hi Said Omar*, a brother and a rare chum.

NAME TAG

“Hi, do you speak English?” said the white slim lady to the nurse at the reception.

“No, I did not go to Harvard because I am an Arab woman whose parents are low income earners!” answered the nurse.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way!” responded the white lady.

“Maybe an identification and a ‘please’ added to your question would make your approach benign, don’t you think?” said the female nurse with a straight face staring straight into her eyes.

“I am Rose Green, please I am here to see Doctor Abbas Hassan?” she replied smiling, a bit embarrassed by her first approach.

“Now that, my sister is called courtesy. Our parents spend most of their precious time teaching us these things here!” remarked the nurse. She dragged a desk phone on the counter and picked the headset, dialled a number and spoke in Arabic mentioning Rose Green to the person she called then hung up, “Fifth floor, second office on your left!”

“Thank you!” said Rose, she looked up the clock hanging on the wall behind the nurse as she walked away.

“You’re welcome, Rose Green!” responded the nurse.

“Excuse me?” said Rose as she turned.

“*ána úhibbu fustaanuk!*” replied the nurse complimenting Rose’s dress.

“Whatever!” *she murmured.*

Rose got into the lift and hit the button to the fifth floor, before the doors went shut, a janitor rushed in and blocked the doors, then walked in with a yellow 24L cleaning mop Bucket whistling the song he was listening to. She watched him press the button to the fourth floor.

“Hi!” he said with his headphones banging.

“Hi” replied Rose with a smile as she leaned her ears close to the headphone.

“*Aisha!* Beautiful song. I enjoyed it as a little girl back in the 90’s.” she said.

“What!?” asked the Janitor as he pulled off his headphones?

“I said, the song, *Aisha*, I love it!” she answered.

“Oh wow, you speak French too?” he asked.

“*Naa!*” she exclaimed

“*Naa?*” *he wondered.*

The lift stopped on the second floor and the doors opened but no one entered, then closed again as it moved up.

“I mean no! Sorry about that, *naa* is a slang for no!” she said.

“I know that!” he replied.

“I used to watch the song on the telly back in the 90’s! Great guy!” said Rose to the Janitor.

“Honestly, it’s my all-time favourite song,” he said smiling in his Arab accent as he put back his headphones. They both smiled.

“Cheb somebody? I can’t really remember his last name and even though I did not understand the language somehow my heart had a strong connection to it back then, so deeply!” she added smiling.

“Yeah, it’s a beautiful song. My wife loved it so much. The Artist, his full name is Cheb Kha...” said the janitor aloud but got interrupted by the sound of an explosion that ripped the floor above them, the lift instantly went to a halt as power blackout hit the hospital. Rose screamed as another explosion rocked the building from a different direction shaking the lift violently. They both heard the cables break and as the car descended they both looked around for

something to hold on to. The car came crashing down hitting the ground floor, sending Rose up in the air.

By the time Rose gained consciousness, water from the bucket was all over her.

“My leg, I can’t feel my leg!” she moaned as she looked around for the janitor but could not see anyone, she then heard the sound of gun shots being fired in the hospital with people screaming.

The lift was half-way open, she quickly began to search for her bag, after a while she spotted it and as she stretched her hand out to fetch it, someone came through holding an AK47. Rose panted heavily out of fear, the man raised his gun and aimed it at her, squeezed the trigger but realised he ran out of bullets.

“*Ya khara!*” he cursed as he pulled out another magazine, set it and cocked his gun then raised it again to shoot her but got hit behind the head with an object. As the man fell on Rose, his head landed on her forehead making her dizzy. She pushed the man’s body off of her and saw the janitor standing holding a fire extinguisher, instead of relief Rose got more terrified as she finally had a good look at his name tag.

“Come with me!” said the janitor, “They will show no mercy to the likes of you!” stretching his right hand towards her.

“I can’t move my leg!” Rose uttered in agony.

The janitor hurriedly rushed for a nearby bed under the rubble. He pushed the debris off the bed and dragged it to the lift, he got into the lift and with caution tried to help her up in order to place her on the bed. While Rose was struggling to stand on her feet, they heard some men fast approaching, the janitor then placed her back on the floor, gave her a gesture to stay mute and play dead as he picked the AK47 then walked away.

While Rose played dead, she overheard him converse with two other men in Arabic, her head got so light she passed out.

JANICE CARPENTERS

Rose could hear her heartbeat, she gently opened her eyes and sighted a vintage ceiling fan slowly spinning above her. She looked around and spotted her bag on a table not far from the bed she lay, the room looked a bit dusty and quite small for a hospital or any kind of clinic. Rose knew she was not in any hospital and had no idea how she got there in the first place, as she tried to move her left leg she felt a striking pain. She groaned and placed her head back on the pillow gently. Rose lifted her head a bit and realised her left leg was tied up with sticks and bounded with some pieces of rag, sort of a hurriedly made casts to hold her leg in one position. She also noticed something like a newspaper kept not far from her feet.

“You need to stay put, uncle Junaid will be home soon. He went to get some medicine from the naturopath!” said a young girl smiling as she stood by the door.

Rose watched her walk into the room happily with some food and water on a tray, she could tell the girl was around 11-12years of age.

“I hope you will like it, it really tastes nice. Learned how to make almost all American food on the food channel, and on the menu today; American lite fried rice!” said the girl as she

placed the food next to Rose's bag then pulled the table towards the bed, "Time to eat!"

"What's your name?" asked Rose.

"Hadiza! Hadiza Miqdad Abdul-Basit!" answered the girl, "What's yours?"

"I am Rose, Rose Green!" she replied.

"What brought you here? Do you work with UNICEF too?" Hadiza inquired.

"No, I am just a tourist! Why did you say that?" answered Rose.

"Because most of the foreigners I know of work with UNICEF!" said the girl.

"No, I don't work with UNICEF, I am on vacation!" Rose responded.

"Okay! I would like to go to America too but not as a tourist. I wanna go study there someday, maybe Oxford University?" said Hadiza.

"That's in England Habiza, not America!" said Rose.

"It's Hadiza; H-A-D-I-Z-A! Get it?" she uttered.

"Got it!" replied Rose laughing, "Could you please help me pass my bag?"

"Sure! Here!" she replied as she handed the bag.

Rose collected the bag, unzipped it and stared into it, then smiled at Hadiza.

“Everything is there. Well, everything that was in the bag when uncle Junaid brought you home...even your small gun!” said Hadiza as she stood up and opened the window to let the fresh air in.

“How long have I been here?” Rose asked.

“Ever since you got here!” answered Hadiza as the two burst out laughing.

“Ouch!” Rose cried out as she felt pain from her leg.

“Oh my God, take it easy! Sorry!” said Hadiza.

“Thank you!” Rose responded smiling as she sighed, “Did your uncle tell you how we met?”

“Hmm! Uncle Junaid doesn’t talk much. Well, he did say you are his friend though and that you need a place to stay until your leg gets healed.” Hadiza answered.

“For how long has your uncle been working at the hospital?” Rose asked.

“You are his friend, how come you don’t know that?” Hadiza asked, “Besides, you resemble Fatimah so I guess uncle will not hide anything from you!” Hadiza joked.

“Well, you know him...he’s not much of a talker, and who is Fatimah?” said Rose.

“Two years before his wife and daughter were killed,” answered Hadiza, “I believe he did tell you about them, right?”

“Right! Yes...he did,” said Rose, she stammered smiling as she picked the plate of rice from the table, fetched some with a fork and into her mouth, “Oh God, pepper!”

“Oh, I am so sorry...I didn’t know the spices are harsh!”

Hadiza reacted.

“I am only messing with you, I love it!” said Rose.

“Really? You do?” asked Hadiza.

“I super love it, you should teach me how to make this!” said Rose.

“Hmm, that’s like a lion asking a dog to teach it how to hunt for Zebras!” said Hadiza.

“Good one there!” Rose murmured with food in her mouth.

“Do you know why I spent my precious time to prepare this delicious meal for you?” asked Hadiza.

“No, why?” Rose inquired.

“Well, I have an assignment to submit on Monday and I’d really need your help!” she said smiling cunningly.

“If it is mathematics just count me out, I am bad with maths!” replied Rose.

“You’re bad with maths in a positive way or a negative way? Anyway it’s history class! I am to present a short spoken word about peace and I am afraid what I wrote might make the entire class laugh at me!” said Hadiza.

“Well, I think I might like your spoken word, I bet it’ll taste as good as your rice. Why don’t you just bring what you have written down and let’s see what we can do about it, huh?” said Rose, she groaned trying to adjust her position on the bed.

“Okay!” said Hadiza, “You’re gonna have to stay put!”

“So, what do you wanna be when you grow up?” Rose asked.

“Well, just one thing and one thing only; a doctor! I would’ve gone for something as complex as an astronaut but no!” Hadiza answered.

“A doctor, huh? Why? If I may ask!” Rose responded.

“So that I’d move to Palestine and save lives, especially the innocent children. I don’t like what I see on TV. Too much suffering.” said Hadiza.

“You sound like a good leader!” said Rose.

“No matter how many good leaders men have, they cannot solve the problems they created through greed and wickedness!” Hadiza replied.

“So, you think men cannot solve the problems the world is facing today?” Rose asked.

“I’m no fool, it’s obvious the world needs God now more than ever!” Hadiza responded.

“Do you believe in God?” Rose asked.

“Don’t you?” Hadiza responded looking into her eyes.

“Well, I used to, when I was much younger!” Rose replied.

“What happened? You lost your appetite for a better and peaceful world just like our leaders who turned their arsenals against their own people?” Hadiza smirked, “I do believe in God and I do pray every day! Actually I see prayer as a form of acceptance, you know; stretching one’s hands to receive what’s rightfully yours from the Father!”

“Have any of your prayers ever been answered and what kind of prayer do you pray?” Rose asked.

“Well, no one has ever prayed for what they never had. Often men pray for things they think they lack even though they already own them! And for your second question; the answer is world peace! I always pray for world peace!” she said.

A knock echoed through the house, Hadiza excused herself and left to check who it was. Rose quickly pulled out the pistol from her bag and checked it; the cartridge was missing, she checked the bag thoroughly but could not find it so she put the pistol back into the bag and held firm the fork.

Hadiza walked in smiling, behind her was the Janitor holding two shopping bags.

“Which one’s mine uncle Junaid?” asked Hadiza.

“Hadidi, which one among the two looks frosty?” he asked lifting the two bags up.

Hadiza seized the smallest of the bags on his right hand and left the room, “Oh my God finally, vanilla flavour? Now you are 100% my favourite uncle!” echoed Hadiza’s voice.

He kept the other bag on the table next to Rose’s bag, “How are you faring?” he asked.

“I am much better! Thanks!” she replied looking at him.

“I had to take the cartridge! As bad as the world seems, a man has got to keep the house safe for his niece! Sorry I had to do that!” he said looking at Rose, “I am Junaid Abdul-Basit, I believe Hadiza has let the water in the dam flood your ears by now!”

“What?” she responded.

“I mean; she talks too much so I guess she must’ve told you where you are and who brought you here?” he said smiling.

“Just a little, she is a smart girl! Too intelligent for her age! I am Rose by the way, Rose Green. I am here on vacation.” she said.

They both stared at each other for a while.

“Thank you for, um, for saving my life back there!” said Rose, “I really don’t know how to uh...”

“You’re welcome!” he interrupted, “Oh and by the way, the one who treated your leg is a female; an old woman, actually an aunt from my mother’s side. She and Hadiza joined hands to dress your leg, I was outside the whole time.” said Junaid, “Nobody knows you’re here except the people I

trust; my aunt and of course the almighty big-mouthed niece Hadiza.”

“It’s okay! I really appreciate it,” added Rose, “So um, your niece told me you work at the hospital for a while now?”

“Yes, four years now!” he answered.

“Your niece, she uh, also told me about your wife and daughter! Sorry for your great loss!” she said sympathetically.

Junaid stared at Rose for a while, “They are in a better place now.” he said.

Rose felt a bit on the edge.

“I could get you a phone to call your relatives or the embassy but I don’t think that’ll be a good idea for now!” he advised.

“I don’t understand.” said Rose.

“You’re all over the news, both local and international.” added Junaid as he picked the newspaper next to her feet and handed it to her. On receiving it she saw her face on the front page with some shots from a CCTV camera taken from the hospital the day she went to visit Doctor Abbas Hassan, the newspaper was written in Arabic.

“What does it say?” she asked.

“Headlines: American suicide bomber killed Doctor Abbas Hassan and thirty five others in Thursday’s deadly attack!” read Junaid.

“I don’t get it!” said Rose.

“Let me read the full story for you out loud!” said Junaid as he took hold of the newspaper, “An American woman Janice Carpenters, code-named Rose Green, who is also suspected to be a double agent with the help of some men believed to be locals launched an attack on Thursday 19th May 2016 at the Abbas-Hass Private Hospital. Doctor Abbas Hassan, is believed to be the primary target of this deadly attack. However, the American government denied any connection with the suicide bomber, the secretary of state stated that Rose Green is a wanted fugitive. The attack cost the lives of thirty five nationals, many others were also injured. Would you like me to continue?” asked Junaid.

“No. Thank you!” she retorted.

“It’s all over the news; you’re a celebrity now. They showed you holding a bag with what they believe were explosives.” he said.

“You don’t believe that, do you?” she asked.

“I am still alive and looking at the bag, am I not?” he chuckled.

“I need to make an important phone call!” she said.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea! I wouldn’t want some thug in camouflage uniform come crashing through the doors of my house, looking for you,” said Junaid, “My home has seen enough of the American contempt, insults and abuse!”

“I am only going to call a trusted colleague! Please!” she beseeched.

Junaid stared at her with such distrust before agreeing to hand her a cell phone. As she was about to dial he told her to wait; he pulled out a match box from his pocket and from it he picked a SIM Card, inserted it into the phone, restarted and gave it back to her.

“Thank you!” she said.

Rose dialled a number but nobody picked, Junaid stood there watching carefully with a straight face, his eyes set on his wrist watch. Seconds later after numerous attempts, she dialled a different number and someone picked.

“Hello” answered a voice over the phone.

“Enlighten me!” said Rose.

“RG? Oh thank God you’re alive! We got worried about you. The director felt that you got caught by the Ghazis so he ordered we pull the plug! We didn’t see it coming; no one knew they planned to attack the hospital that day too. There was a sketchy Intel on the attack but the agency didn’t think it was a serious threat, the director felt it wasn’t real and so we overlooked it. I am so sorry!” responded the voice over the phone.

“Pull the plug on me? Is this some kind of a joke?” asked Rose.

“What’s your 20?” asked the voice over the phone.

“So they went all Hiroshima on me?” asked Rose.

“It’s not like that RG”, responded the voice over the phone, “An opportunity the agency couldn’t afford to miss came up just minutes before you stepped into that hospital; we got Intel from a very reliable source that Suleiman Zaim Waqar the successor of Ahmed Al Tufail along with many others on the list made a decision that same morning to kidnap Doctor Abbas Hassan. Plus, the doc knows too much and the director was afraid that he’d crack so the best thing was to...”

“Take’m all out at once?” asked Rose.

“Yes!” came the reply.

“Knowing full well I was there also?” asked Rose, “You’d have just warned me!”

“I am very sorry RG, it was our only hope of cleaning the closet and nailing those bastards!” came the respond.

“You then decide I wasn’t useful anymore?” Rose interjected.

“Did you take him out?” inquired the voice over the phone.

“I asked you a question, damn it! I deserve an answer.” said Rose.

“Did you take him out?”

“Who?” asked Rose looking at Junaid.

“Juliet Alpha!?”

“Affirm!” she answered reluctantly.

“Job well-done RG! That’s good, the director is here, he wants to have a word with you!”

Rose went cold and hung up the call then handed the cell phone to Junaid; he switched it off, removed the SIM Card and used a lighter from his pocket to burn it.

TEAR DROPS FROM THE MOON

Hadiza walked in whistling the song *Aisha*.

“You refused to eat my fried rice Rose?” said Hadiza and made a grimace.

“Aww! Your uncle and I got talking about some important stuff but now I must eat it all before I open this big mouth of mine again to talk, do you have it with you?” asked Rose as she began to eat the food served to her.

“Yes, it’s right here,” said Hadiza as she pulled out a sheet of paper and was about to read it.

“Give us a minute Hadidi!” Junaid interrupted.

“Come on, let her read it. This can wait!” said Rose.

Hadiza looked sad and said, “But uncle Junaid, she agreed to help me with my...”

“Please Hadidi, this is very important.” he interposed.

Hadiza walked out hesitantly.

“When you saw my name tag back at the hospital, you looked petrified. Can you tell me why?” Junaid asked.

“It was nothing, I was just... perplexed. I thought you’d attack me too.” she answered.

“Hmm, okay!” he responded as he walked out of the room. Few minutes later he came back with a photo, sat down gently on the bed close to her right foot and passed it to her.

“Your family?” she asked.

“Yes, Fatimah and my beloved daughter Halima,” he answered, “Some years back, my wife and daughter went to the local market to make some purchase. It was my birthday, Halima was just a year older and they wanted to surprise me I guess. I told her not to bother, asked her to wait until we have enough money to celebrate but Fatimah just couldn’t stop being Fatimah. So she and Halima went to the market maybe to buy me some present, who knows.” he sighed, “...the most unfortunate thing was, your government believed it has finally located Ahmed Al Tufail, the one man they believed was the mastermind behind the terrorist attack on their Embassy in Nigeria three years ago, so they sent one of their drones. Fatimah and Halima were in the opposite shop.”

Rose forced words out saying, “I am so sorry. I may not understand how deep it hurts you but I...”

“What have they done wrong?” asked Junaid as tears rolled down his cheeks, “and you...why did you lie to me? You are no tourist. You are just another terrorist! You were

after the Doctor as well. We knew your government wanted him dead too. Your cowboys came riding their iron horses rattling their venomous tail with their hellish sound of democracy; all they do is steal, kill and destroy our lands. They are men just like us, and we must take back what belongs to us!” as he wiped the tears from his eyes, “...the brotherhood suspected the Doctor of being a spy recruited by your government, he was a traitor to his own people. Question was, why did they want him dead?”

“What do you mean by, ‘why did they want him dead?’” Rose asked.

“The explosions...that was not the handwork of the brotherhood! They did plan to attack the hospital that day but only to kidnap the doctor in order to gather some information from him. Who else wanted him dead?” said Junaid.

“Are you saying the American government blew the hospital?” she asked.

“Are you saying that you don’t believe you can be expendable?” he replied.

“I don’t follow!” Rose replied.

“The one who took over the leadership after Ahmed Al Tufail was also killed that day at the hospital!” he said.

Rose kept quiet for some time pondering what might have gone down back at the hospital.

“We know who you work for! Ever since the day you landed, the brotherhood already got informed,” said Junaid, “It so happened that they didn’t tell me they were coming to kidnap the doctor that same day. They made that decision after I’ve left for my day’s job.”

“You knew I was coming to the hospital that day?” she asked.

“I didn’t, but the brotherhood knew. They were informed! So they wanted to use one stone to kill two birds!” he added, “We know you work for the CIA! Your photo was circulated around the city to all the brotherhood since the day you arrived,” said Junaid, “Someone wanted you off the radar as well!” as he walked towards the window and sat on the sill bending his head down.

“Why didn’t you let them kill me?” she asked.

“I don’t know! I really don’t know!” he responded, “When I first saw you in that elevator I just could not believe my eyes!”

“I don’t understand!” she said.

“Your eyes, just like Fatimah! I had to compose myself so as not to scare you!” he replied, stood to his feet and walked to the centre of the room.

After a long thought, Rose lowered her head down watching her palms, “Your name came sixth to Ahmed Al Tufail on the most wanted list. Few months ago an American drone operator and his family got murdered in cold blood in Nairobi while on vacation and we got Intel that you were behind the attack. Not only was he one of the best drone operators, he was also the first son of an American diplomat. The government had to do something when they realised that your people went about killing every man they believed were drone operators. The Ghazis have killed nothing less than seventeen men in cold blood with their families!” said Rose.

“They killed my family. Tit for tat! They took away Fatimah, and my Halima,” *he wept*, “They destroyed the lives of many innocent people, their hearts must be hung on the gates of hell!” he protested.

“Murphy did not kill your family, you took vengeance on the wrong man in Nairobi Junaid.” said Rose in a calmed voice, “Some months ago we discovered a plot by some prominent Middle-Eastern men to kill all known drone

operators. They paid a huge sum to some mole at the agency and a list of names and addresses was given to the *Ghazis*. My best friend was the lead investigator but he disappeared some months back in *Kirkuk* and never heard of or from again! He believed it was an inside job. However, he left something tangible behind,” said Rose, “I contacted Doctor Abbas Hassan; he promised me that if I can come here, he would give me something that would help me crucify the culprits. I purposely came to *Mosul* to see the doctor in order to secretly interview him, the agency doesn’t really know the main objective of my coming here...well, I guess. I also have a reason to believe that a prominent American businessman known as John D. Watson is the middleman who...”

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t care about your stupid investigation. Vengeance says; crush the ones who intentionally hurt you and bring an end to the reign of the wicked who showed no mercy to you or your loved ones!” Junaid interrupted.

“Look Junaid, I am sorry about your family, but you of all people should understand that what happened to them was an accident. My friend believed that some elites secretly and

indirectly funded these operations and it is my duty to bring them to justice,” she exclaimed.

“An accident? Huh? And what about the rest of the innocent people within the radius of your merciless arsenal? How dare you call a premeditated assault an accident?” he responded furiously, “...and that is supposed to make everything okay!? Accident!? I will tell you what an accident looks like; the existence of your nation,” he said angrily as he spat on the floor.

Hadiza walked into the room smiling, covering her face with a sheet of paper, “Uncle Junaid, can I come in now?” she asked.

Junaid sighed then forced a smile out saying, “Yes Hadidi! You may come in!”

“Can I read it now Rosy?” asked Hadiza as she walked in.

“Sure, I am all ears sweet angel. Let’s hear it.” answered Rose.

“Promise you won’t laugh?” said Hadiza.

“Scout’s honour!” Rose hollered as she held up three fingers.

Hadiza stood close to the bed and smiled, then opened the sheet of paper she held,

“Peace cannot be purchased with war, for peace is priceless. Peace calls on forgiveness to be served to those who hate you seemingly for no just cause, thus becoming what your enemies can never be; a vessel of love and light that shines through the dark times.

Peace is a torch that is fuelled by blood of the innocent
It is the heart bound with a hot barbwire that continues to beat even when immersed in a furnace of injustice.

We can say men are all the same but a man reflects what he is made up of; light or darkness!

The choice is yours to make; the light sword or the heavy torch, one of these two a man must take.

The path to peace may be filled with thorns of cruelty for Peace asks the prey to embrace the predator.

However, its destination yields the sweetest fruit that heals and turns the victim into the victor.

Peace shall piece through the hungry drums of war, for light has conquered darkness!” read Hadiza.

“Oh my God!” Rose exclaimed as she clapped excitedly, “You actually wrote that?”

“Yeah!” said Hadiza as she nodded smiling, “But I know it requires some correction!?”

“Wow that’s very touching! I have told you several times Hadidi; words cannot stop bullets nor can it turn wicked men from darkness and unto the path of light! Junaid scoffed.

“I love it Hadiza, I think it’s one of the most beautiful speeches I have heard so far!” said Rose looking to see if Hadiza would smile.

“Kill-joy!” said Hadiza as she walked out looking sad.

“She is naive, a girl whose heart is yet to fathom the depth of cruelty in this world,” said Junaid, “She needs to know the truth before she gets older!”

“You didn’t have to be harsh on her! I think she sounds like someone who have already encountered the light! Let her grow up! She is just a little girl!” said Rose, “I just admire her! Hope for a better world in such innocent eyes. What about her parents? Where are they?” Rose asked.

“They died when she was two! Would you like to know how they got killed too?” asked Junaid.

“Look, I am sorry if my presence reminds you of so many bad things that happened to your loved ones!” Rose said, “Why did you save me if you hate us this much?”

“I hate no one, I don’t hate you nor your people. I just despise...”

“Americans?” asked Rose.

“Your nation! It is nothing but a wolf in sheep’s clothing! I have made it my duty to strip the skin off of the wolf!” said Junaid.

Hadiza ran into the room looking frightened and spoke to Junaid in Arabic, he then told her to stay in the room and not come out as he walked out and shut the door behind him.

Hadiza looked scared as she stood next to the bed, Rose held Hadiza’s hand firmly.

“Is everything okay? Are you alright?” asked Rose.

Hadiza turned and made a gesture to Rose to stay quiet. The girls could hear what was happening in the living room, they could hear Junaid talking to some men.

“What’s going on? What are they saying?” whispered Rose.

Hadiza seemed afraid as she translated softly, “Brother Junaid, we were told some traitor brought the American woman and is probably harbouring her in the neighbourhood, so we have informed the rest of the brothers. They should be here in the next ten minutes or less, gear up, we are going for a manhunt and whoever gave a safe haven to that infidel, would be sent to hell along with her.” she held Rose’s hand

firmly as she continued in a low tone, “Don’t worry, uncle Junaid will not tell them anything!” she turned and stared into Rose’s eyes trying to reassure her, “God will protect us, He always does!”

Rose gave a weak smile.

“Why didn’t you tell me the truth? I saw your picture on TV, but uncle Junaid told me that you are innocent and that once your leg heals, you will leave and he made me promise to keep this a secret.” added Hadiza.

Rose could not say a word, captivated by the innocence in Hadiza’s eyes at the same time her attention was on the conversation between Junaid and the men that came to see him.

Minutes later the men left, the girls could hear Junaid lock the main entrance. He walked in a hurry and shut the window in the room.

Junaid went under the bed where Rose was lying and pulled out a big wooden box, from it he took a machete, placed it on the floor then brought out an AK47, “When this is all over, I’d like to hear you explain to this little girl what her beloved cousin did and why she deserved to be killed by your government. Your cartridge? Check under the pillow, in case

things get worse,” he said to Rose, “Hadidi, go to Grandfather’s house and stay there until I come to pick you up.”

“Wouldn’t she be safer here at your place?” asked Rose.

“But I want to stay here with Rosy!” Hadiza insisted.

Junaid shouted at Hadiza in Arabic, and she walked out crying.

“You stay here and do not make any sound, if you want to live,” said Junaid.

“I still think you should let her stay here with me,” said Rose.

Junaid gazed at Rose, “People with big mouth should learn to keep it shut! Okay Rose Green?” he added as he pushed the wooden box back under the bed.

Rose heard the sound of a chopper approaching from afar, Junaid stopped what he was doing, he looked a bit confused as his cell phone rang.

“Hello!” said Junaid as he picked, “Hello?”

No one answered so he hung up and ran out of the room with the Ak47 as he banged the door behind him. Immediately he got out Rose heard some men shouting in Arabic followed

by gun fire as the sound of the chopper got louder. She remained quiet as her heart pounded.

For about fifteen minutes, there was exchange of gunshots and she had no idea what was going on outside. She could not move her leg. Rose started to shiver on the bed, and then the shootings stopped.

Women and children in the neighbourhood were heard screaming and some crying accompanied by the rotor sound from the chopper which seemed to be hovering above the neighbourhood in circles.

Rose quickly put her hand around her back and felt the cartridge, loaded her pistol and aimed at the entrance to the room as the chopper moved away from the rooftop of the house, she could hear someone crash the main entrance to the house down.

“Clear!” said a man’s voice.

Rose got scared and started sweating, she cocked her pistol as footsteps approach the room where she was hiding. She heard a gunshot, and another.

“Clear!” said the voice again.

As she waited patiently, the window came crashing in as someone tied to a rope broke through and quickly pointed a gun at her.

“Put down the weapon! Easy! Easy!” said the man.

Rose’s body was shaking as she slowly turned to her left towards the position the man stood.

“U.S marines! We are here to take you home ma’am!” said the man.

Rose gently placed the pistol on her thigh, sighed and felt a bit relieved as the marine’s uniform got more visible to her.

“She is here, she’s okay!” shouted the marine.

Five men came through the door and in no time brought in a stretcher and carefully laid Rose on it.

They moved her out of the room, through the living room where she noticed Junaid lying lifeless in another room. Rose sighted many dead bodies of young men on the ground as they moved through the compound. The soldiers carried her on the stretcher toward a Humvee packed outside as the chopper came hovering over; there were about six Humvees waiting with more soldiers on guard. By the time the marines took her outside the compound she saw an old woman weeping in the streets not far from Junaid’s residence; the old woman was

holding Hadiza's corpse as the wind blown by the rotors blew the sheet of paper off her hand and into the skies. Rose began to sob.

The soldiers pushed the stretcher into a Humvee and shut the doors.

"X-RAY Two-Three, THIS IS ALPHA One-Two, RADIO CHECK! Over?" said one of the marines in the front.

"ALPHA One-Two, THIS IS X-RAY Two-Three, I READ YOU 5 BY 5, Over!" replied a voice over the radio.

"Operation SRG, mission accomplished! Returning to base, Over?" said the marine.

"Say again, Over?" responded the voice over the radio.

"Operation SRG mission accomplished. Returning to base! Over?" the marine repeated.

"Copy that soldier! Is the cat still breathing? Over?" said the voice over the radio.

"Affirmative! Over?" answered the marine.

"Good! You boys go ahead and gulp as much whiskey as you can down the base, drinks on me! Out!" came the response.

"WILCO!" answered the marine as the Humvees zoomed off.

Rose closed her eyes and could not hold her tears from falling.

###

Hi, thank you for reading my book. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review?

Thanks!

Richard Shekari.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Richard Shekari is a novelist, lyricist, singer, and a poet from Abuja, Nigeria. He is a children's rights and peace activist who never fails to express his passion for a better world. He is a Search & Rescue Officer with the National Emergency Management Agency, Nigeria. He is an alumnus of the Federal University of Technology (ATBU) Architecture department Bauchi State, Nigeria.

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