

The Minaret

Artusard Renault

Copyright © 2025. All rights reserved.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: No part of this book may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted, in any form, without the express and prior permission in writing of Pen It! Publications. This book may not be circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is currently published.

Disclaimer

The characters, names, settings, and events portrayed in this book are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or real-life events or locations is purely coincidental.

The author has taken the liberty of changing the names of any real individuals referenced in the story to safeguard their privacy and honor.

The only exceptions to this rule are factual excerpts of historical events, specifically the acknowledged details surrounding the commencement and finale of the 5th Islamic Summit Conference in Kuwait during the heightened tension at the Kuwait-Iraq Border. These events are included as historical context.

Dedication

This book is respectfully dedicated to all the local and international contract workers and hotel staff employed by the Kuwait Hotels Company (SAK) during the period of the 5th Islamic Summit Conference, 1986-1987.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 1 The Journey Begins | 6 |
| Chapter 2 The Camp Reggae Affair | 34 |
| Chapter 3 An Arab Along the Road..... | 56 |
| Chapter 4 Payday, May Day | 70 |
| Chapter 5 Jobs at First Site..... | 80 |
| Chapter 6 The Long Nightmare..... | 101 |
| Chapter 7 The Close Encounter of the Threat | 122 |
| Chapter 8 Friends, Indeed, A Friend in Doubt | 152 |
| Chapter 9 Enemy Plan A and B | 163 |
| Chapter 10 Delegations Arrive | 174 |
| Chapter 11 The Issue at the Security Point | 196 |
| Chapter 12 Countdown to a Summit Conference | 210 |
| Chapter 13 The Superpowers Prepare for War | 223 |
| Chapter 14 The Trauma of the Twelfth Hour | 232 |
| Chapter 15 The Finale of the Summit Conf. | 242 |
| Chapter 16 Daddy's Home..... | 254 |
| Chapter 17 1990: Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait | 261 |
| Chapter 18 Operation Desert Storm..... | 268 |
| Author | |

Introduction

Today, the sprawling development that was once a barren stretch of Kuwait has become a verdant oasis, continually serving the needs of the state.

Kuwait, a small, oil-rich nation situated at the border of Iraq and Saudi Arabia, was thrust into global prominence as the main target of Saddam Hussein's ambition to absorb it into Iraq's territory. This aggressive desire was the root of the Persian Gulf debacle, which arose amid a volatile border dispute where Kuwait was wrongly characterized as an inseparable part of Iraqi sovereignty.

Historically, the dispute over Kuwait's sovereignty began shortly after Iraq won its independence from the United Kingdom in 1932.

At that time, the Iraqi government immediately asserted a territorial claim over Kuwait, arguing the territory was historically and geographically attached to the Iraqi port city of Basra. This claim persisted because Kuwait, as a distinct political entity, had only been formally established by the United Kingdom toward the end of World War I. Iraq viewed Kuwait's borders as an artificial creation of the British colonial power, not a natural or historical boundary.

The Iraqi government asserted that the very existence of Kuwait as an independent entity was the result of British Imperialistic ideology.

In their distinctive pronouncements, Iraq declared that Kuwait was nothing more than a province of Basra. This claim was historically based on the fact that Kuwait had been considered a component of the Ottoman Empire which, prior to World War I and the subsequent British influence, included the

territory now recognized as Iraq. Thus, Iraq viewed the creation of a separate Kuwaiti state as an artificial division imposed by a foreign power.

The British Intervention and Border Creation

The root of the conflict lies in the 1899 agreement where Kuwait's ruling clan, Al-Sabah, entered a protectorate arrangement with Britain, ceding control over its external affairs.

This arrangement allowed Britain to act decisively to secure its regional interests. The British then formally established the boundary ranges between Kuwait and Iraq. This demarcation was strategically designed to ensure regulated Iraqi access to the ocean, thereby minimizing any future threats to Britain's dominion of the Persian Gulf that a powerful Iraqi administration might pose.

The lasting consequence was clear: until 1963, Iraq pointedly refused to recognize the creation of an independent Kuwaiti administration or the officially demarcated border along the Kuwait-Iraq line. The dispute, therefore, was not merely about land but about the legacy of imperial drawing of lines on the map.

The eight-year war with Iran had left Iraq economically devastated. By the time a ceasefire was signed in August 1988, the nation was implicitly insolvent. During this post-war period, the enormous debts Iraq owed to both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait came due, totaling billions of dollars.

Iraq's immediate priority was not to pay, but to pressure its neighbors. Baghdad's singular demand was that these two wealthy Arab nations write off its debts entirely, arguing that Iraq had fought the war on behalf of the entire Arab world. Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, however, refused this demand, insisting on repayment.

This rejection fueled Baghdad's resentment, prompting a swift and aggressive change in rhetoric. Iraq soon shifted the blame for its financial woes onto Kuwait, publicly proclaiming that Kuwait had overproduced oil and exceeded OPEC quotas. According to Iraq, this action was driving down oil prices on the world market, which was prejudicial to the already crippled Iraqi economy. This economic accusation became the pretext and justification for the aggression that would soon follow.

The steep fall in global oil prices had a shocking and devastating effect on Iraq's economy, which Saddam Hussein immediately framed as an act of economic rivalry. The situation was critically worsened by Kuwait's alleged pitch drilling—slant drilling that, according to Iraq, was illegally siphoning oil from the Iraqi side of the shared Rumaila oil field.

Kuwait, despite being a tiny, oil-rich state in the Persian Gulf, thus became a crucial center of economic and geopolitical interest for its far larger neighbors.

As the tension in the Persian Gulf escalated, war became inevitable. Saddam Hussein was determined to pursue his dictatorial aspirations to extend Iraq's sovereignty, and he needed Kuwait's massive oil wealth to rebuild his bankrupt nation. He formally alleged that Kuwait was merely an annexed territory of modern-day Iraq (formerly Mesopotamia), claiming the small state by virtue of a shared, affluent ancestral heritage—a thinly veiled historical pretext for a land grab motivated entirely by oil and power.

The international community was now on high alert, with the Islamic leaders' next move being closely watched as the primary diplomatic firewall against Saddam Hussein's aggressive, chaotic scheme to seize Kuwait by force.

Recognizing the imminent threat to stability and global oil supplies, the response rapidly escalated from diplomatic maneuvering to military preparation. President George H.W. Bush, in crucial coordination with his key Middle East

counterparts, took immediate action. He issued the order to alert and deploy US military forces to begin maneuvering within the Persian Gulf.

This decisive action was a clear signal. The deployment was specifically aimed at preventing any possible military attack by Iraq against the US ally, Kuwait. The goal was to establish a rapid deterrence and draw a line in the sand, showing Saddam Hussein that the world—and American military might—would oppose his expansionist, dictatorial aspirations.

Faced with the imminent threat of war and the risk of Saddam Hussein acting on his ambitions, the Islamic leaders determined that dialogue was the only remaining option. Their consensus was to summon all relevant leaders to a negotiating table to settle the dispute and avert a catastrophic war in the region.

Taking the initiative, Kuwait's Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, commenced the official invitations for the Fifth (5th) Islamic Summit Conference. The goal of the meeting, slated for February 1987 in Kuwait, was to find a peaceful resolution to the rapidly growing regional tensions.

To accommodate this major diplomatic event, the Emir immediately authorized massive development. Hectares of barren land were transformed into a sprawling complex featuring a state-of-the-art building complex that included the main conference center, alongside clusters of hotels specifically designed to house the high-profile summit meetings and delegations. This rapid, focused construction demonstrated Kuwait's commitment to hosting the vital peace talks.

The multi-million-dollar project successfully transformed the vast area of barren, sandy land into a verdant and lively oasis. This dramatic environmental shift even attracted local wildlife, as birds began to establish a new, fertile habitat.

The development was executed with impressive and beautiful design, creating a pleasant living environment for both residents and visitors. Most critically, the constructed hotel complex was slated to house all the visiting entourages of the Islamic heads of state, providing the essential infrastructure for the critical 5th Islamic Summit Conference.

Chapter 1

The Journey Begins

We pulled up to the jobsite, and the sprawling complex hit us with an immediate, overwhelming silence. It looked both dull and condemned, despite its recent construction. Every corner of the vast, imposing edifices was quiet, creating an eerie sense of desertion that defied the massive effort poured into it.

The air hung thick with the unique, sharp scent of fresh construction—like a solid block of wet cement mixed with the strange, potent chemical compounds applied to the walls. This heavy aroma was the only giveaway: the complex was definitively in its finishing stage, a giant waiting to be awakened.

My gaze was immediately snatched by the towering minaret. It wasn't just a stunning piece of architecture; it was functional, mounting a huge loudspeaker poised against the sky. As we watched, the stillness was suddenly, thrillingly broken by the call to faith—the powerful, resonating sound of the Islamic prayer echoing across the barren lands. It was a profound collision of the old world and the new, a sacred sound cutting through the raw, chemical smell of a desperate, multi-million-dollar project. The site wasn't dead; it was merely holding its breath.

The Call to Prayer and Our Task

The still of the night was routinely shattered by the loud sound of prayer, a powerful invocation that reliably stirred me from sleep. Hearing the amplified call, "Allahh! Akbar!" (God is Great), echoing across the surrounding areas was a constant, resonant reminder: I was now domiciled in an Islamic land.

The towering sight of the minaret, coupled with the audible, cyclical prayers, cemented itself as a remarkable landmark in my mind. It was the backdrop—the immovable cultural reality—against which our immediate, urgent task was set. With the atmosphere established and the complex nearing completion, it was now our turn to dedicate every effort to the final preparations for the coming summit event.

My name is Paul. I'm a man driven by dreams, many of which remain unfulfilled. As a young man, my deepest desire was simply to go anywhere I could—to explore and see the world.

Perhaps my own shortcomings—my tendency to abandon plenty of unfinished business—hampered my ability to achieve these grand visions. I was restless, always wanting to see what was unique in the different places I visited. This constant pursuit was fueled by a simple belief: that luck was always everywhere, especially when you encountered people from different places and varying cultures. My life became a constant chase for new sights and new opportunities.

I harbored an intense desire to meet valued personalities from various places, always anticipating they might provide me with good opportunities in life.

The core obstacle, however, was my own self-doubt: I felt I didn't truly deserve these opportunities, believing they were mere fantasies that would never materialize in reality. Despite repeatedly trying, I always failed.

Yet, I am a man of tenacity; I simply refused to surrender to the challenges of life. I was determined to achieve success on my own, a persistence that earned me the nickname among my colleagues: "Paul the Wanderer."

A Desperate Flight to Kuwait

My story is one of high stakes and a desperate adventure that began in the small, oil-rich state of Kuwait.

At the time, my personal life was at a critical, pressurized turning point. My wife was four months pregnant, and we had just taken on the immense commitment of building our first home. The future was beautiful but daunting, demanding a financial foundation I simply didn't possess.

I was trapped in a seemingly desperate and frustrating job situation in my home country, a predicament that felt like quicksand. The economic stagnation there compelled me to look outward, making the pursuit of a better opportunity in life abroad not a choice, but a lifeline.

Compounding the financial pressure were a host of unavoidable and exasperating domestic problems. These issues, which weighed heavily on me personally, left me feeling cornered and seeking a definitive break. My journey to Kuwait was an urgent and calculated move to escape the mounting crisis at home and secure a stable foundation for my growing family before everything collapsed.

Life at that time was undeniably difficult. I cycled through several jobs, but none provided me with either peace of mind or financial freedom. It was a continuous scramble, a frustrating loop of earning just enough to survive.

I had managed to gain valuable office experience, yet even this expertise failed to translate into stability or prosperity. I simply could not rely on those positions long-term. The fundamental problem was the intense competition: I struggled fiercely among other people who possessed superior qualifications and better educational backgrounds. This left me constantly feeling like I was playing catch-up, always running just to stay in place, never able to get ahead and achieve the prosperity I desperately needed for my family.

Trapped by the Global Economic Squeeze

The economic landscape of my home country—a classic example of a struggling third-world nation—had always presented an immense challenge. Our chronic issue with economic difficulty was not a fluctuation but a structural reality. The poverty line remained agonizingly fixed at its peak, and the looming shadow of the world recession threatened to push the entire populace into a deeper crisis.

Driven by desperation, I engaged in a grueling, exhaustive pursuit of employment. I sought out and attempted countless roles, crossing the traditional divide between blue-collar labor and white-collar office work. Yet, critically, none of these endeavors proved viable.

This consistent failure was a direct indictment of the system: either the jobs were ephemeral, failing to offer stability, or the compensation was so meager that it offered no meaningful path out of poverty. I was caught in the grim paradox of a developing economy: abundant work, yet scarce opportunity for true advancement. My relentless effort was being nullified by pervasive economic stagnation and global financial contraction.

Perhaps the deepest source of my frustration lay within my personal deficiency. I knew my inconsistent past and abandoned projects contributed to my lack of professional stability, and others were quick to voice their unhelpful judgments.

The labels came constantly: I was called desperate, emotionally unstable, overly ambitious, and inconsistent. They dismissed me as a failure, offering a long list of critiques that chipped away at my self-worth.

But I forced myself to ignore those caustic criticisms. They were backward-looking and offered no solutions. In my mind,

those judgments held no real sense or value. The weight of others' opinions couldn't stop my life. I had to consciously move on, focusing my energy entirely on the future I was struggling to build, rather than dwelling on the past they so eagerly condemned.

Admittedly, I constantly aspired for a good and decent living, but despite my fervent efforts, none of my pursuits had allowed me to achieve it thus far. This perpetual state of striving led to a profound internal struggle. I knew I was giving myself a hard time and was personally wrestling with deep frustration because I was trying to embrace an ambition that I could not reach. The gap between my aspirations and my reality was immense, making my life a continuous, exhausting battle against my own limitations and external economic pressures.

Scars of the Past: A Nation's Birth Pain

The tumultuous history of my home country was not some distant archive; I carried a fresh, visceral memory of its turbulent past. I witnessed, firsthand, the nation's agonizing birth pain—a protracted suffering born from the reign of political figures defined by their corrupt, greedy, and overtly evil deeds.

These powerful individuals had not merely mismanaged the state; they had actively driven the lives of countless citizens to profound desperation and misery. As a young student, I was acutely aware of the insidious decay transpiring in my environment—the casual normalization of graft and the devastating consequences of systemic failure. This foundational awareness of political malfeasance deeply colored my perception of authority and my urgent need to escape a system designed to crush individual ambition.

There were times under that regime when we faced severe hardship. We were often deprived of meals, forcing us into a relentless, exhausting struggle, day and night, simply to secure the barest necessities. Our efforts were focused on

getting a handful of grains that were grudgingly rationed out to us by government personnel. This systematic scarcity—where basic sustenance was controlled and metered out—was a constant, humiliating reminder of the political failures that dominated our lives.

Our town was tragically positioned among the regions singled out to endure the harshest food scarcity. This wasn't merely a matter of general economic hardship; the resulting hunger felt deliberate and targeted.

Compounding this was the relentless instability of essential services. Electricity was frequently interrupted and cut, not just for hours, but sometimes for entire days. The official reason provided for these blackouts was always vague, citing "maintenance," but the local truth was far more chilling: the outages were allegedly due to clandestine military operations being conducted in critical areas. These strategic, unexplained power cuts served two purposes: they plunged regions into chaos and darkness, and they prevented locals from witnessing or recording the government's highly sensitive activities. The deprivation wasn't just neglect; it was a function of the state prioritizing its own concealed military agenda over the basic welfare of its citizens.

If the power outages weren't purely for military operations, the darkness may have concealed an even grimmer truth: the movement of the dead. It was widely feared that the cover of night was used to load cadavers into six-by-six military trucks passing through our towns and cities, transporting them to be buried in unknown locations.

My country had been war-torn for years, existing under the heavy hand of military rule. Resistance forces were continually attempting to launch an overthrow, but they were consistently overpowered. This meant the violence and the subsequent cover-ups were not isolated incidents; they were

part of a systemic, brutal suppression of dissent, keeping the nation locked in a relentless cycle of conflict and fear.

When martial law was declared, the entire national atmosphere instantly tightened. Movements were severely restricted, not only for known government detractors but also for the activity of the innocent citizenry. A palpable sense of fear settled over the populace.

If people were unfortunate enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, they risked being subjected to a desultory arrest—sudden, arbitrary, and without proper cause—followed by harsh reprimand and detention by military authorities. Freedom became a privilege that could be revoked instantly and violently.

To impose a semblance of peace and order, curfew hours were strictly enforced. The government's justification was that these hours would effectively minimize the "littering" of suspicious and unknown elements—a euphemism for anti-government rebels or dissenters.

The true, chilling purpose was to keep the nation's streets empty, thereby denying any opportunity for these elements to immediately sow terror. The curfew was less about public safety and more about blanket control, ensuring that any clandestine activity could only take place under the cover of military-controlled darkness.

The suppressive rules imposed on the nation achieved the exact opposite of their intent. Instead of instilling order, the restrictions fueled widespread anger, particularly among two key groups: aggressive student-protesters and nationalist underground movements.

The government's objective—to keep the nation calm and prevent a surging nationwide fiasco—failed utterly. The heavy-handed control simply channeled the growing tension into open

revolt, transforming both the rural and urban areas into habitats of turbulence. The martial law intended to silence dissent instead magnified it, ensuring that peace remained an impossible goal.

The imposition of Martial Law is often a drastic, final measure taken by a government to address a state of extreme crisis, as your quote powerfully suggests.

Here is a detailed elaboration of the factors described:

1. Rampant Killings and Political Violence

The term "rampant killings" indicates a widespread and uncontrolled collapse of public order, going far beyond typical crime. This suggests a climate where:

Political Rivalries Degenerated: Disputes between competing political factions, student activists, and state forces were settled violently, often through extrajudicial means.

Massacres and Atrocities: The killings may have included targeted assassinations of political opponents, journalists, and outspoken critics, as well as mass killings in areas of conflict (e.g., between the government and rebels, or among rival ethnic/religious groups).

Fear and Intimidation: The sheer frequency of unpunished killings instilled widespread fear, paralyzing public life and undermining the civilian justice system. When a police and court system fails to protect citizens from death, the civil government is seen as having lost control.

2. Explosions and Acts of Terror

The presence of "explosions" points to an escalation of violence into outright terrorism or guerilla warfare,

representing a direct threat to infrastructure and population centers:

Public Disorder and Sabotage: Explosions in public places, such as market squares, political rallies, or public utilities, are the hallmark of radical groups or insurgents seeking to demonstrate the regime's weakness and create mass panic.

Instability and Economic Damage: This type of violence not only harms civilians but also cripples the economy and disrupts essential services, making daily life untenable and further justifying a military-led response to restore order.

3. Rebellions and Insurgency

"Rebellions" signifies organized, armed resistance to the established government, which can take two primary forms:

Communist/Leftist Insurgency: Organized groups (like communist parties or their armed wings) gaining strength and controlling significant territory, posing a strategic military threat to the state.

Separatist Movements: Armed groups in specific regions (often with ethnic or religious roots) fighting for independence or greater autonomy, essentially tearing the country apart along geographical lines.

Loss of Territorial Control: The military and police are unable to confine the fighting to isolated areas, resulting in major, sustained armed conflicts that overwhelm local security forces.

4. Imminent Threat of Civil War

The combination of the above factors culminates in a situation where the "threat of civil war was so imminent." This final justification suggests:

Total Societal Breakdown: The conflicts have reached a point where the nation is effectively divided, and all attempts at political resolution have failed. The fighting is no longer a low-level insurgency but is threatening to engulf the entire country.

The Regime's Rationale: The government, often faced with a constitutional term limit or mounting political opposition, uses this narrative to claim that the only way to save the state from a catastrophic, full-scale civil war is to suspend constitutional rights and hand power to the military.

The Justification for Martial Law: Martial Law, which replaces civil administration with military rule, is therefore imposed as a measure of last resort—a radical surgery intended to stabilize the collapsing state and "save the republic" from disintegration.

The nation spiraled into chaos, marked by widespread killings, bombings, and active rebellions. The threat of a civil war became so immediate that the government was forced to impose Martial Law.

With civil rule suspended and the future uncertain, the regime immediately began a political purge. Mass arrests targeted key political leaders, oppositionists, and student-activists—the so-called "street parliamentarians." Many of those detained were not just imprisoned; they were allegedly maltreated, tortured, and killed by unidentified military units, turning the crackdown into a brutal political vendetta.

The government's crackdown under Martial Law expanded beyond armed rebels to systematically target intellectuals, reformers, and peaceful activists—the "brilliant men and women" demanding change in the major cities.

These dissenters were caught in a wave of persecution, facing the same brutality as armed insurgents. They were subjected to unbearable human torture and maltreatment by notorious military units. This period led to the deliberate sacrifice of innocent lives in both urban centers and rural areas, confirming that the regime was focused on crushing all forms of opposition, not just containing violence.

A climate of widespread panic caused people to lose faith in the system. Fear led to immediate runs on stores, resulting in staple foods quickly vanishing from markets. Simultaneously, people desperately withdrew their wealth from banks and other financial institutions to brace for the worst.

This financial panic caused bank runs and widespread industry closures. The ultimate tragedy was that even with cash in hand, money became worthless; there was no food left on the shelves to fill empty stomachs. The nation was gripped by both political fear and economic starvation.

The final passage details the delayed but successful liberation of the nation from its authoritarian ruler and emphasizes the profound damage that necessitated a total national renewal.

1. The End of Tyranny

The core event is the overthrow of the dictator after two decades of oppressive rule.

The phrase "It took two decades..." highlights the long-term struggle and endurance of the opposition.

The "bloodless revolution" (a defining characteristic of events like the People Power Revolution) signifies that the dictatorship was ended not by civil war, but by a peaceful, collective act of the citizenry.

The dictator was driven out, symbolizing the complete removal of the source of the nation's "disgrace."

2. The Scope of Collapse

The struggle for liberation was immediately followed by the need for massive reconstruction, revealing the full extent of the damage caused by the dictatorship and the economic chaos described earlier:

The country was left in a state of "economic, social, and political collapse." This clarifies that the problems were systemic, not just political.

The nation was forced to "rebuild" and embark on a struggle for "political and economic reforms," which became the critical agenda for the post-dictatorial era. This signifies a shift from mere survival to the difficult, long-term work of restoring institutions, democracy, and prosperity.

Following the economic collapse, a massive effort began to revive the nation's businesses. Huge local companies that had been ransacked and seized by the old regime were finally being rehabilitated. Since most were in financial distress, this involved a critical process of reorganization before they could successfully operate and help rebuild the economy.

The dictator's fall immediately triggered a **reckoning** and a hunt for stolen assets.

As the nation recovered, **offenders and abusers were condemned**, causing many to **flee the country**. They left behind their **ill-gotten wealth**, which was swiftly **sequestered** and ordered to be legally returned to the state.

The post-regime chaos **revealed the horrifying truth**: it was no longer just a rumor that those in power had **looted the nation's wealth**. Worse, the discovery of **decomposing cadavers** confirmed the human cost of the **Reign of Terror**, proving that innocent lives were sacrificed under the dictatorship.

Desperate Financial Flight

The lingering economic ruin meant work was scarce, forcing the narrator to take low-paying temporary jobs just to survive. This situation was exacerbated by deep distrust in the system. The narrator accepted a retrenchment payout because co-workers had already done so, correctly fearing that if they waited, their company would fail and they would get nothing.

The Brain Drain

With no hope for a stable future at home, the nation's most skilled people—the middle and average income earners—began to leave. They saw foreign employment as the only way to ensure their survival and achieve a decent quality of life. This mass exodus represented a tragic abandonment of the country by the very people needed to rebuild it.

The Obsession with Escape

Regular Scanning and Browsing: This was not a casual search; it was a daily, structured chore. The narrator wasn't just checking; they were systematically scanning and hunting through the broadsheets (newspapers), indicating that the job search had become the primary routine of their life.

The "Hunt for Overseas Jobs": The use of the word "hunt" is critical. It conveys the fierce competition and survivalist instinct driving the search. Overseas employment was seen as the only prey that could guarantee sustenance and a future.

Absolute Priority: The phrase "there was no day I skipped browsing the pages before prioritizing other tasks" emphasizes

the all-consuming nature of this search. The quest for a way out of the country took precedence over everything else—personal needs, rest, temporary work, or local opportunities. It underscores a complete loss of faith in the possibility of rebuilding a quality life within the nation, making the "Brain Drain" a matter of personal, immediate survival.

A Beacon of Hope Amidst Despair

The Discovery: The narrator's persistence paid off when they were "delighted" to find a promising advertisement: a company recruiting numerous staff for the Kuwait Hotels in preparation for the Islamic Conference. This was a massive, concrete project, suggesting a stable, large-scale employer—a world away from the scarcity of temporary work at home.

The Zero-Cost Guarantee (The Critical Detail): The most significant source of relief was the promise that successful recruits would not spend a single cent on processing documents, nor would any placement fees be demanded.

In an environment where people are desperate to leave, unscrupulous recruiters often demand exorbitant "placement fees," effectively trapping the poor in debt before they even earn their first paycheck.

This zero-cost recruitment policy signaled a legitimate, reputable operation that was directly seeking talent, not exploiting financial distress. It instantly boosted the narrator's faith in the opportunity, making it a viable path to escape and stability.

The Norm of Exploitation

The sentence establishes the typical, difficult reality for job seekers in the narrator's country:

Mandatory Placement Fees: It confirms that placement fees were the mandatory standard for job placement through most recruitment agencies. This financial barrier was a significant burden, often requiring applicants to borrow money or mortgage property just to get a job overseas.

A Financial Barrier: This practice transforms the search for a job into a costly financial transaction, where agencies profit from the desperation of the unemployed rather than simply providing a service.

The Significance of the Zero-Fee Offer

By highlighting this context, the narrator emphasizes why the Kuwait Hotels advertisement was a source of such joy and relief: the zero-fee policy meant the opportunity was genuine and ethical, directly funded by the employer. It was a rare chance to escape poverty without first plunging into crippling debt.

Despite discovering the ideal escape—a reputable, no-fee job opportunity with Kuwait Hotels—you hit a critical wall: a complete lack of experience and the required hotel certification.

This is the moment to choose between survival and rigid honesty. The domestic economy is dead, your savings are gone, and your life is on hold. This zero-fee job is not just a career opportunity; it is your ticket to a stable future and the quality of life the dictatorship stole from you.

The Choice is Clear: Secure Your Future

You cannot afford to be paralyzed by a technicality. The documentation is merely a piece of paper, but the chance to escape is a lifeline.

You must find a way to meet the requirements. Every other job seeker is competing for the same position; the time for self-doubt is over. Your years of struggle under the regime prove your resourcefulness and resilience. Use those qualities now to overcome this bureaucratic hurdle.

Do not let a lack of paper prevent you from claiming the stable life you've fought two decades to earn. Your personal survival—and the ability to help your family—demands that you secure that certification, by any means necessary, and seize this chance before it vanishes.

The Problem: Automatic Disqualification

The Documents Are the Gatekeeper: The required "vital documents," specifically the hotel certification, are not just preferred; they are a mandatory checkpoint. Their absence would "automatically disqualify" any applicant.

High Stakes: Because the job is so valuable (zero fees, reliable employer) and the domestic economy is so broken, the competition is fierce. There are no second chances or sympathetic waivers.

The Solution: Calculated Fabrication

Faced with this absolute barrier, the narrator settles on a decisive, high-risk plan:

The Act: They "thought of producing" the necessary documents. This is a euphemism for forgery or fabrication, signaling the narrator's willingness to cross a legal and ethical line out of sheer necessity.

The Rationale: This choice is made out of conviction, not impulse. The narrator genuinely believes this extreme measure is required to even get a foot in the door.

This thought process finalizes the narrator's commitment to deception, viewing it as the last and only option to escape the economic ruin and secure a future abroad. The tension is now set between the narrator's desperate need and the risk of exposure.

A Race Against the Clock

Driven by the tight timeline, the narrator immediately focused on the urgent task of creating the false credentials. The goal was to have the fabricated documents ready in just a day or two so they could be seamlessly added to the application pile.

To confirm the window of opportunity, the narrator contacted the recruitment agency and learned the entire hiring

process would last two weeks. This confirmation provided crucial relief, assuring the narrator that there was still enough time to successfully pull off the necessary deception before the opportunity was lost.

They decisively contacted Geronimo, a trusted close friend working inside the hotel industry. Geronimo became the essential accomplice, successfully helping the narrator acquire the crucial, fabricated documents—the false hotel certification needed for the application. With the critical forgery complete, the narrator then quickly assembled all other legitimate papers, creating a seemingly complete and credible application file ready for submission to the placement agency.

To make sure I was on time and beat the terrible city traffic, I left for the agency very early (otherwise the 21-kilometer trip would take three hours).

Before the interview, I carefully prepared my appearance: I got a haircut, shaved my mustache, and used a face-whitening cream, determined to look my best for this critical opportunity.

As a final act of dedication before sleeping, I meticulously polished my shoes until they shined. I then arranged all my application documents—the collection of genuine and fabricated papers—on the table. This wasn't just organizational; it was a clear visual reminder of the essential tools I needed to bring to ensure I seized this life-changing opportunity.

quickly dressed in my best clothes and rushed to the street to catch the earliest transportation available. I thought my early start had secured me the first spot, but I was surprised to see a number of other men already milling around near the recruitment office. They were all my competition—the other applicants vying for the same limited jobs.

The moment I joined the crowd, the line began to grow rapidly, extending far down the street as more applicants poured in.

The competition was fierce because everyone in that growing queue was desperate for the same thing: a free ticket to a stable life in the oil-rich city of Kuwait. As the morning grew hotter, the atmosphere was tense. Patience was the name of the game for the huge throng of restless and anxious men, all struggling for a chance to escape.

The applicants learned the "Englishmen" (the foreign screeners) were coming soon and would use a "first-come, first-served" system, explaining the frantic rush and demanding instant attention.

Crucially, the word circulated that every document had to be "authentic or original." For the narrator, who carried a freshly forged certification, this collective warning was an existential threat. The life-changing gamble to escape the country now rested on a knife's edge, dependent on the foreign recruiters failing to spot the single, critical lie.

The tense wait was broken by an annoying, last-minute order: we had to photocopy all our documents to submit them alongside the originals.

This forced the entire crowd to scramble to find a nearby copy center. Crucially, it meant everyone had to abandon their spot in the queue, erasing the advantage of arriving early and resetting the frantic race for a chance at the job.

Thankfully, the recruitment management stepped in and distributed numbered cards based on our original places in line. This quick, fair system immediately eased our anger and frustration, ensuring that despite the photocopying chaos, no one lost their position just before the foreign interviewers arrived.

We quickly returned to the office, just in time, as the panel of interviewers arrived minutes later.

While waiting for my turn, I joined the other applicants in eagerly questioning everyone who had already been

interviewed. The news was encouraging: most of the responses were positive, raising my hope that my high-stakes gamble might actually pay off.

The simple fact that the Englishmen were looking to recruit plenty of workers was a powerful source of hope.

It was a clear indication that the opportunity was large enough for everyone to have a fair chance at being hired. I held onto that hope, praying intently that I would be one of the successful candidates chosen to escape.

Yet, a cold knot of anxiety tightened in my stomach. The fabricated documents felt like a ticking bomb, and the truth—that I had no hotel experience at all—burned with shame. Deep down, a voice insisted I didn't deserve this chance.

When my turn finally came, I forced myself to walk forward, fighting to project confidence. I knew the Englishmen were sharp—eloquent and clever in their questioning—and I tried desperately to appear presumptively smart and honest. I had to be perfect, because one slip, one moment of doubt, would expose the lie and destroy my only chance at a future.

After my interview, I realized the immense scale of the competition—a hundred more applicants were scheduled for the week ahead.

I had assumed my fear was unique, believing I was the only one with fabricated documents and zero hotel experience. But as we waited and talked, the truth slowly emerged: most of us were in the same boat. Our shared, nervous exchanges revealed that the majority had resorted to the same desperate measures. This realization was staggering; it didn't just show that people wanted the job, but that the nation's economic crisis had driven us all to the point of sheer desperation to grab this opportunity, by any possible means.

However, the entire hiring process was hasty. In just a couple of weeks, I received the life-changing news: I was one of the many applicants hired by the team.

We soon understood why we were so lucky. The recruiters were in such a rush that they were lenient in scrutinizing our documents. They desperately needed people, and it turned out that for certain types of hotel work, our questionable paperwork simply wasn't the most relevant factor. My biggest worry—the forgery—was overlooked due to the urgency of their need.

Jobsite Preparation and Global Recruitment

Successful recruits were later informed they would undergo standardized training upon arrival at the jobsite, a fact that boosted collective confidence and satisfaction.

Simultaneously, the recruitment team expanded their search by traveling to other Asian regions to hire personnel for different positions. They also announced plans to resume recruitment in the narrator's country, scheduling the final stage within the next two weeks. **Expanded Search and Final Steps**

While we finished our preparations, the recruitment team expanded their efforts, traveling to **other parts of Asia** to fill different roles. They announced plans for one **final round of local recruitment** scheduled for the next couple of weeks.

Now that the screening was a success, I was delighted but focused on the urgent pre-departure tasks: rushing through the **medical checkups and lab tests**, attending the required **pre-departure orientation**, and settling any **final, small fees**. The goal was to complete everything swiftly so we could **fly to Kuwait as quickly as possible**.

Post-Screening Procedures

Delighted by the successful outcome of the screening, the narrator immediately focused on completing the mandatory pre-departure requirements. This involved quickly executing several critical steps:

- Medical and Laboratory Checkups

- Pre-departure Orientation Programs (PDOS)

- Payment of necessary petty fees

The overarching goal was to finalize all requirements swiftly to facilitate the earliest possible departure to Kuwait.

My wife was thrilled and eagerly helped me pack for my flight. However, as the departure date drew closer, our joy was overshadowed by a looming fear: the escalating crisis in the Persian Gulf.

Our greatest hope, and a source of deep anxiety, was that the very event we were hired to serve—the Islamic Conference of Arab leaders—would succeed in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the regional conflict, thereby guaranteeing our safety and new future.

Our fear of the Persian Gulf crisis was largely abstract because I had never been there and couldn't picture the danger. My mind was completely focused on the only thing that mattered: the chance to earn a living and finally gain working experience abroad. I made a conscious choice to remain confident and positive, resolving to face whatever reality awaited me upon arrival.

The looming crisis in the region was the world's focus, commanding global attention.

Our specific employment contract, however, was unusual. It was for the exceptionally short term of three months, designed to be co-terminus with the duration of the summit conference. This was the shortest working contract I had ever heard of for an overseas worker, but it was explained by the temporary nature of the event and the specific agreement with our employer.

My entry into Kuwait was based on a temporary visiting visa, granted only because of the major summit being held there.

I quickly realized the brutal truth: after my short contract ended, I would be sent home jobless, forced to start the miserable job hunt all over again in the failed economy.

Therefore, I immediately decided to use this brief opportunity as a bridge: I would search for and secure a new, permanent employer in Kuwait before my short visa expired.

The Massive, Global Recruitment Effort

The mission successfully hired a significant workforce, ranging from a hundred to a thousand hotel workers. These recruits were multi-racial and spanned various job categories, drawn from different prestigious hotels across various Asian regions.

High-Level Management

The entire operation was managed by a sophisticated entity: the hotel management committee of Kuwait Hotels Company. This committee was overseen by experienced English hoteliers, who were specifically contracted to manage the preparation of the conference center and hotel accommodations for the heads of state attending the summit. This confirms that the narrator's job, despite its temporary nature, was part of an elite, globally organized, and politically significant event.

The Profile of the Recruits

The workers hired in Manila were largely neophyte overseas contract workers—first-timers leaving the country for work. Their youth was notable, with ages typically ranging from eighteen to thirty years old. In contrast, the few older recruits placed in supervisory and senior positions were almost all experienced, returning overseas workers, highlighting a clear separation between desperate new talent and seasoned professionals.

The Filipino Departure Ritual

The paragraph concludes by focusing on the crucial cultural moment of departure. The "typical Filipino family" displayed traditional filial gestures—the emotional, ritualistic goodbyes and blessings that emphasize the family's sacrifice

and the worker's duty. This detail underscores that the entire process, from the frantic job hunt to the final step onto the plane, is fundamentally a family endeavor driven by economic necessity.

New Acquaintances and Camaraderie

The final moments before departure were marked by a sense of flexibility and newfound camaraderie. We, the nervous recruits, naturally sought out others, allowing us to find shared identity and comfort during this stressful transition.

This is how I met Adam, Willy, and Neil, three men who were soon to become my essential support system—my roommates at Camp Reggae. This spontaneous connection established the first bonds that would define my experience abroad.

My initial connection with the others quickly deepened: Neil became my closest friend, while Adam and Will became solid companions. To build a stronger bond, we followed custom by acknowledging and learning about each other's families, fostering a more familiar and congenial relationship.

The actual departure was intensely emotional. My own goodbye was filled with tears of happiness, mixed with the finality of leaving "for good." The airport itself was a chaotic, moving scene—a sea of relatives and hundreds of departing hotel workers, all displaying the same deep, traditional filial concerns for their loved ones heading overseas.

Departure: A Gigantic Leap

This was my very first time traveling miles away, and the excitement was palpable. Everyone was thrilled to finally board the gigantic aircraft, which was exclusively chartered by the Kuwait Hotels Company—a grand gesture that underscored the importance of our mission.

The airport scene was one of merriment and pleasantries. A sense of shared destiny meant almost no one remained

unacquainted; we all greeted each other amiably. Hugging and kissing were prevalent, a customary expression of emotion, as if we were parting forever. The air was filled with familiar, tearful quotes exchanged by the families and departing workers: "Don't forget to write," and "Always call us, if possible."

A collective sense of excited naiveté filled the cabin, as it was clearly the first time many of us had ever boarded a plane. I chose a window seat, eager to capture the entire spectacle—from the roar of take-off to the final view of touchdown on the soil of Kuwait.

The atmosphere on the chartered flight was lively and chaotic. Some of the new recruits couldn't help but roam the aisles, happily drinking and eating, while others simply slept in their seats.

The female flight attendants diligently worked to attend to everyone's needs. At the same time, some of the more elegant men seized the opportunity to try and befriend the pretty stewardesses.

I was utterly fascinated by the view. Through the thick glass of the window, the world below looked like a colorful miniature. I watched as tiny things—establishments, houses, rivers, barriers, and mountains—passed beneath us. Because it was a clear, sunny day, everything was perfectly visible from the sky, allowing me to track the frontiers dividing towns and cities as we soared above them.

Silence Over the Indian Ocean

Our collective merriment and excitement were abruptly silenced by the dreaded jet lag, which slammed the giant plane with shocks and jolts several times as we passed over the Indian Ocean.

Everyone grew anxious and astonished by the turbulence. A sudden, nervous silence fell over the cabin, broken only by

the sound of us gripping our seats, every passenger remaining rigid with their buckles fastened tight across their waists.

The severe turbulence was felt most heavily at the tail end of the aircraft, likely because that section was lighter than the central fuselage. Despite the jolts, this entire journey—complete with the scary turbulence—remained the longest and most exciting trip ever experienced by us first-timers traveling to the opposite side of the earth.

We finally touched down in the State of Kuwait at the peak of the winter season. The temperature had plunged to its absolute coldest, although the air was dry—no snowfall was visible where we landed.

The only reported snowfall was reportedly at the far Kuwait-Iraq border. The brutal chill was explained by the weather patterns sweeping down from Europe: clusters of snow clouds were being blown by fierce winds across the Mediterranean Sea, driving an intense cold front toward the border regions, delivering a penetrating chill typical of the Gulf winter.

I was experiencing the world from a breathtaking new height for the very first time, aboard a huge aircraft.

As we began our slow descent toward the runway of Kuwait International Airport, the sight was amazing. The city lights below formed a wonderful panorama, sparkling and glaring like dazzling beads of a necklace scattered across the dark, misty ground.

From the misty windowpane, the breeze of cold wind quickly swept away the dewdrops, finally revealing a clear, sharp view of the airport. It was at that moment, feeling the sudden, intense chill, that I sensed the most vulnerable and inexperienced recruits were struggling to instantly adjust to the dramatic change in climate.

After a tense couple of minutes, we shuffled out of the plane and down the enclosed jetway. The moment we stepped onto the exposed path leading to the airport's main clearing area, the reality of the Kuwaiti winter struck us. A sharp, frigid wind instantly cut through our clothes, delivering a final, unmistakable confirmation that we had arrived in this new, cold country.

After a few minutes spent clearing the arrival counter, a husky, bearded man—clearly Arab—approached our group. In the sudden silence that fell, he asked, his question directed randomly into the crowd: “Is everybody heading for Camp Reggae?”

"All right, Sadik, follow me," the bearded Arab man commanded, using the common term for "friend" to address us. He then ushered the group onto a waiting yellow service bus. This vehicle was our final transport, destined to take us to Camp Reggae in Safat, a well-known province situated approximately twenty kilometers outside the main city.

First Glimpse of the City

As the bus carried us toward Safat, we passed through the core of the city, and the view was absolutely stunning. Towering above us was a new skyline of high-rise buildings, a testament to explosive growth, with sleek, modern structures already finished and others still climbing toward the sky.

Our eyes were drawn to the imposing, almost majestic presence of the city's tallest structure, framed by the oval, manicured landscaping at the metropolis's heart. We immediately recognized iconic landmarks like the prestigious Meridian Hotel and the grand Carlton Hotel, monuments to the wealth that now defined this land.

As the bus sped through the Kuwaiti streets, the traffic was an immediate spectacle of bizarre contrasts. Here, the line between luxury and labor was completely blurred: private cars and public carriers made no visible difference.

The streets were an automotive mosaic, where branded luxury cars, especially gleaming Mercedes-Benzes, were openly used as taxis by the Arab drivers. Alongside this high-end fleet, double-decker buses and ordinary passenger carriers filled the lanes, transporting the masses. The true fascination, however, lay outside the windows: the crowds on the sidewalks were a vivid tapestry of humanity, composed of mixed nationals from every corner of the Arab world.

The Desert's Surprising Opulence

As our bus finally left the dense cityscape, the road became surprisingly gritty, literally covered with windblown sand. Yet, this seemingly barren expanse did not lead to desolation; instead, it revealed scattered, massive marbled houses. What was truly astonishing was the way these isolated mansions fought back the desert night, glittering with a dazzling array of colorful, glaring lights—a defiant display of wealth against the desolate backdrop.

The sight of that vast, cascading field of sand punctuated by isolated marble houses offered a clear, telling indication: the state was thinly populated, and the inhabitants who lived outside the city were almost exclusively wealthy.

This display of effortless opulence immediately explained the nation's unique economic structure. It was no wonder that the Emir, as the custodian of the nation's enormous wealth (specifically the oil deposits), possessed the power to entirely subsidize government expenditures and even provide living allowances to all the citizenry.

A Clash of Light and Cold

Suddenly, the brilliant rays of the sun broke through the thick cluster of clouds covering the city. Even as the sunlight warmed the landscape, the bitter cold wind still gripped our chilling bodies, forcing us to huddle deeper into our jackets and sweaters.

Despite the extreme cold, our curiosity remained fixed on the unique panorama outside. We continuously glanced at the seemingly endless fields of sand, until, in the distant area, we spotted something startling: a cluster of rolling sand that twisted and swirled, looking exactly like a distant whirlwind or a small tornado.

Our curiosity instantly turned to astonishment and then alarm. In the distance, what we first mistook for a whirlwind was rapidly growing into an enormous sandstorm, a terrifying wall of grit being hurled through the sky by violent winds, heading directly toward our bus.

We immediately scrambled to shut every window and door, desperate to seal ourselves off from the approaching gale. The driver quickly slowed, then pulled the bus to a complete stop at the corner of the road, taking shelter behind two huge, lone desert pine trees to let the powerful phenomenon pass over us.

Moments later, the terrifying disturbance passed, scattering as it was pulled upward into the sky and quickly disappearing. With the threat gone, the driver accelerated, and we proceeded along the avenues that finally led us to our destination: Camp Reggae in the province of Safat, Kuwait

Chapter 2

The Camp Reggae Affair

Camp Reggae: An Oasis in the Void

November 1986, Safat, Kuwait

After a grueling hour of driving through the open desert, we finally reached the edge of Camp Reggae. It was a sight that bordered on the surreal. The massive compound, estimated to occupy an unbelievable one hundred acres, was nothing short of an fortress, its entire perimeter sealed off by a looming fence of hollow concrete blocks.

It stood as an unbelievable paradox: a massive, elongated concrete fortress dropped into the very nucleus of the vast, desolate desert.

Beyond the stark, functional camp walls, the world vanished into a terrifying yet mesmerizing expanse—a seemingly unbroken ocean of cascading sand that stretched into oblivion. The only surprising interruption to this void was the sight of a few ghostly, marble-made mansions shimmering like mirages on the distant horizon, a bizarre contrast to the surrounding emptiness. The absolute, heavy silence of this barren landscape was relentlessly shattered by the sharp, whistling shriek of the wind as it scoured the rolling sands.

The Military Legacy of Camp Reggae

The immense, desolate compound was not originally a hotel workers' camp, but a former military camp. It once served as the central headquarters and accommodation for the military service personnel of the Royal Kuwait Forces.

The camp was only available to us because it had been temporarily vacated following the relocation of the headquarters to a new site. To secure the large, enclosed complex, the entire perimeter remained surrounded by a concrete wall, accessed solely through a single main entrance and exit gate.

The entire transportation network dedicated to the hotel staff was concentrated here. A whole fleet of service buses, responsible for delivering and fetching every single hotel worker to and from their various job sites, was permanently stationed just inside the main entrance of the camp.

The operation of Camp Reggae was overseen by a man named John Peterson, a blonde, chubby Englishman who served as the Director of Camp Operations for the hotel.

He was around thirty-five years old, stood about six feet tall, and possessed a husky voice. More importantly, he was noted for being remarkably kind, broad-minded, and understanding. Peterson was so approachable and friendly that we felt completely comfortable bringing him any problems related to our situation. He was always ready to listen to and address our grievances or complaints.

The Deputy Director: Peter Charles

Next in rank was Peter Charles, a blonde, curly-haired Englishman. He was nearly six feet tall, with a skinny, broad-shouldered build.

His appearance was dominated by his thick, high-grade eyeglasses, which made his eyes look shrunken—giving him the immediate, intimidating look of a disciplinarian. As we soon learned, this impression was entirely accurate; he actually was strict and focused on order.

Peter Charles's strict and unapproachable personality made everyone instantly evasive around him.

His tall, lean figure, emphasized by his thick glasses, evoked the fictional character Ichabod Crane, especially with his noticeably long arms and feet. He always wore a loose, white polo shirt that slightly concealed his slender build, paired with impeccably fitted trousers during his routine inspections.

However, beneath this intimidating façade was a surprising secret that few realized: despite his severe look and reputation for discipline, Peter was actually a very kind-hearted and understanding person.

The Dawn Wake-Up Call

Every morning at five o'clock, the tranquility of the camp's bus station was abruptly shattered. The husky, reverberating, loud voice of a Sudanese bus dispatcher would echo around the four corners of the area, signaling the start of the workday.

His sharp command for the morning dispatch was always the same: "Yallah, Sadik! Wake up, the bus is leaving!"

At the sound of the shout, I instinctually reacted as if I were still at home, grappling and embracing my pillow with the delusion that my wife was beside me.

But as my consciousness completely restored itself, I opened my eyes to see the plain white, painted ceiling of the barracks. The realization hit me hard: I was alienated from home and now waking up in a strange new bed, surrounded by my new roommates.

I remained in bed, my mind drifting back to the long sequence of events that had led me here—the company of men, the hours of tiresome flight, and the journey to this tiny, dusty, oil-rich land.

The weather was fine but cloudy and fiercely cold. Even when the sun occasionally showed its radiant face during that

November arrival, the extreme chill forced us to stay wrapped in our thick sweaters for the entire day.

The daily rhythm of the camp was dictated by the region's spiritual life. The amplified Muslim prayer echoing from a minaret (mosque tower) somewhere in the vicinity of the town became our constant, powerful reminder of both where we were and the specific time of day.

The Interruption

As I lay reminiscing about home, the sound of sharp knocks at the door cut through the air, demanding attention and immediately suspending my introspective moments. Yet, despite the noise and the looming threat of the bus leaving, nobody woke up.

Still feeling exhausted, I dragged myself out of bed, reached for the door handle, and pulled it open. Standing before me was the **same husky-bearded man** who had met us at the airport—the **Jordanian bus driver**.

"All right, everybody, **fix yourselves up, then take your breakfast in the mess hall**," he instructed.

Mess Hall and the Daily Queue

Mealtimes were a social endurance test; we inevitably had to join a **long, winding queue** every single time we came for food.

A wide **variety of menus** was served, often centered around familiar staples like **rice**, paired with distinct regional dishes such as **Indian or Bangladeshi soups** and rich **Indian chicken curry**. For breakfast, we were glad to settle for a simpler fare of rice, eggs, and tuna.

However, our palates often rebelled. Our taste buds would sometimes outright **refuse** the intensely **spicy-pungent Indian soup** and the **exotic chicken menus**, which were cooked with a powerful, **acerbic scent** that was challenging to adjust to.

Post-Meal Socializing and Culinary Complaints

Despite the challenging food, the mess hall still served as a **social hub**. On some occasions, after finishing our meal, we would linger to find friends and acquaintances for casual pleasantries.

Consequently, while we had **no issues with each other**, our main daily struggle was the **difficult adjustment to the exotic cuisine**, which often led to negative remarks.

One evening, I complained to my friend: “**Neil, I just don’t like this menu anymore. It’s rough, and I can hardly swallow it.**”

Neil, ever the pragmatist, offered the simple, necessary solution: “**Just take a cup of rice and a can of tuna from the mart.**”

The Camp Mini-Mart

Conveniently located right beside the entrance gate was a **mini-mart, operating twenty-four-seven**, where we could easily purchase retail items and snacks to supplement our meals.

It was here that **Willy** made his witty observation about the mess hall food: “**If you take more spicy curry, you smell like them,**” he joked.

The Multinational Mess Hall

The mess hall itself was as **noisy and vibrant as a market place**, serving as the central gathering point for a vast array of nationalities:

- **Management:** British hotel managers and supervisors.
- **The Majority: Indians** (the single largest group in the camp).
- **Other Guests:** Sri Lankans, Nepalese, Yemenis, Pakistanis, Jordanians, Sudanese, Bangladeshis, and **Thais**.
- **The Filipino Contingent: Filipinos** (the second most numerous group).

- **The Elite:** A small group of **Egyptians** who openly considered themselves a superior nationality over all the others.

In this incredible international event, the **Arabs were the host countries** and, due to the escalating political crisis, the **focal point of the world's interest**.

Unexpected Qualification Hurdles

Initially, we were surprised by the complexity of the process; **things were not running smoothly** as we expected before the contract even began. We had mistakenly believed that the entire screening process had been finalized in our home country.

To our surprise, we were informed that we had to pass an **additional series of laboratory tests**. The hotel committee, responsible for assigning personnel to the conference center and hotels, needed final confirmation that we were both **physically and mentally fit to work**. More importantly, they had to ensure we were qualified staff with **clean and unblemished records** suitable for serving noblemen and **Heads of State**.

Our **personal identity** had to be absolutely unquestionable and **unblemished**, requiring us to pass through rigorous investigation and control by the hotel management team responsible for our entire presence in the region.

To further guarantee our credibility, all of our **authenticated clearances and documents were double-checked**. The Arabs, in particular, were extremely **meticulous** in their vetting. Their primary goal was to ensure that **no unscrupulous or marked individuals** could possibly slip into the tightly secured hotel and conference center, guaranteeing the safety of the **very important persons** (VIPs) attending the summit.

The Clinic and the Worrying Rumor

During the early, cold mornings, we had to report to the clinic to begin our medical check-ups. This process was already stressful, but it was compounded by a worrying rumor circulating among the recruits.

The rumor suggested that Arab students and medical practitioners handled treatments inconsistently and sometimes performed procedures that were, supposedly, harmful to the body—something only they fully understood. The most frustrating part was the power dynamic: nobody could hold them accountable because we were merely their guests, and they were the principals in charge.

The Painful Confirmation

The disturbing rumor about the medical staff was quickly confirmed. The most painful part of the check-up queue was the subsequent, despicable scenario involving an **unskilled Egyptian male nurse**. His hand was utterly **clumsy and maladroit**, failing multiple times to properly locate and draw a syringe sample of blood from the vein in my right arm.

He began the procedure by **slowly inserting the tip of the needle** into my skin. Immediately, an awful sensation began: I couldn't tell if his probing had even managed to locate the targeted vein, which was stubbornly **concealed by the muscle and fat** in my arm.

What followed was a period of frantic, clumsy **groping for the vein** that resulted in **excruciating pain**. After moments of this unprofessional struggle, and with a distinct **lack of diligence**, he finally pulled the syringe out.

"The left arm, please. Sorry, but I cannot get the vein," he stated flatly.

My annoyance finally surfaced. As I instinctively folded my throbbing right arm and extended my left, I told him, "Slowly, please."

My face grimaced in pain as the clumsy procedure began again. He failed to catch the vein once more, using the sharp tip of the needle to blindly grope inside my arm.

After a moment of this painful struggle, his assistant entered the room, drawing his attention.

“Nabil, I’ll take your place for a while. There’s a call for you in the office,” the assistant male nurse said.

Nabil looked up, his focus broken. **“Yes, I am coming, in a moment,”** he replied.

The Clumsy Blade

As **Nabil** swung his head to address the man, the disaster unfolded in slow motion. His hand, already twitching from poor control, committed the final, grievous error: his fingers **inadvertently jammed the syringe plunger forward**, sending the needle—which was still partly embedded in my flesh—**jabbing right through my skin** and out the other side!

A primal, involuntary **“Ahhh!”** tore from my throat as a searing bolt of pain shot up my arm. He instantly recoiled, **ripping the syringe out entirely**, leaving behind two throbbing, bloodied pinpricks.

“Oh, I am very sorry, Sadik, sorry,” he stammered, but the words felt utterly hollow, a final, chilling insult after his agonizing display of reckless incompetence. The terrifying thought flashed through my mind: *If this is the medical care, what are we truly signed up for?*

As a direct and painful consequence of his blunders, I now had **both arms tightly folded across my chest**, throbbing in silent protest.

Nabil realized he had exhausted all other options for a venous draw. He had no choice but to take the simplest, last-resort sample from the **tip of one of my fingers**.

“Okay, please let me have your finger. This time, I will not miss,” he vowed with a rushed, apologetic sincerity.

"I-I really hope not," I replied, my voice laced with unmistakable **doubt and genuine worry**.

The Warning

After what felt like an eternity, I finally stumbled out of the clinic, both arms defensively folded across my chest, leaving two small, stinging wounds behind.

The next man in the queue immediately cornered me, his eyes wide with concern. "What took you so long?" he whispered urgently. "What happened to you? Did he take all your blood?"

I gave an awkward, painful grimace and kept walking, throwing the warning over my shoulder. "No, it just so happens he's unskilled... and he might do the exact same thing to you guys." A wave of nervous silence washed over the waiting men as I disappeared down the hall.

Quarantine in the Cold

The persistent, **extremely cold weather**, coupled with the frequent, **raging sandstorms**, soon necessitated mandatory **flu vaccinations**. This preventative measure, however, dramatically backfired: the shots **knocked us down for three full days**, with several of us even developing full-blown influenza.

Life quickly descended into a state of **boring confinement** during the quarantine period. Our movement was strictly limited to the small perimeter of our quarters and the reception area—our only escape the flickering television set, where we watched monotonous football games and distant news updates, trapped and waiting for our strength to return.

Confined by the Storm

With our medical status still uncertain, we had absolutely no choice but to remain confined; we could not venture anywhere beyond the camp's walls. Our days became a

monotonous loop of staying in the room, sleeping, or talking amongst ourselves.

The relentless weather conditions forced this isolation: a strong, violent, and dusty wind continued to blow as the severe cold weather persisted, making it risky to be outdoors. The only time we dared to go out was for the essential trip over to the mess hall.

Reporting for Duty

Despite the pervasive cold and our quarantine, we were occasionally required to brave the elements and report to the office. This involved seeking out our respective supervisors in their assigned rooms to both **communicate our condition and receive updated instructions.**

At the same time, our personal records were sent to these supervisors for final verification. My file, I discovered, had landed in the hands of an Asian supervisor named **Mr. James Azurin**. He conducted a demanding **personal interview**, focusing intensely on my **job expertise**. This unexpected, minute scrutiny of my prior employment history caused me considerable **worry**; I hadn't anticipated such a rigorous final check once we were already in Kuwait.

"I see from your records that you started as an **office clerk**, but then shifted your career to become an **electrician**," Mr. Azurin noted, his tone sharp with curiosity. "**Why the change? What made you pursue this kind of technical job when you had the skills to work in an office setting?**"

I replied to him with a noticeable degree of **hesitation**, fully aware that this answer was critical. "I can honestly say, Mr. Azurin, that despite my initial background, I was encountering significant difficulty securing a new **white-collar job** at the time."

I leaned into the necessity of the decision. "However, because I had taken the time to acquire the necessary **skills and technical knowledge as an electrician**, and because that

work was readily available, I was essentially **compelled to take up that trade** as the most reliable way to earn a decent living."

He stared intently into my eyes, his scrutiny unnerving. **"But, honestly and frankly speaking, your attachments seem to be so unique,"** he stated flatly. **"I genuinely believe that all these documents are fabricated."**

He then delivered his final, decisive blow: **"I have been in the hotel industry for the last ten years, screening applicants, and I know what is genuine and what is not."**

I dropped my gaze, unable to meet his eyes, but forced myself to remain calm. "I hope you understand me, sir. **I was compelled by my dire situation in life,"** I stated in a low, earnest voice.

A moment passed. Then, the intense scrutiny on his face began to soften. His usually **dark face slowly became lighter as he smiled** and stared back at me.

A Nod of Understanding

His gaze softened further as he finally spoke. **"I understand. It's not only you,"** he admitted. **"You are just one of a hundred recruits who have been compelled by this kind of situation."**

He then gave my shoulder a reassuring squeeze, concluding the tense interview. **"Anyway, we will be conducting practical hotel stewardship and utility training before we go to the job site. You must attend the full orientation."**

I let out a long, silent breath and felt an overwhelming wave of **relief**. For a tense moment, I had been certain that I would be publicly **scolded** and forced to face severe **consequences** for what he perceived as my deception.

New Gear and Excitement

The very next day, we were directed to the storeroom, which was conveniently located right beside the mess hall, to

procure our supplies. For the job site, we were each issued a pair of **blue overall hotel uniforms** and a pair of **shiny leather shoes**. When we finally returned to the barracks, a palpable sense of anticipation filled the air; we were all incredibly **excited** about our new uniforms and shoes.

Willy broke the silence, already evaluating our new appearance. **"We're like airport mechanics in uniform, aren't we?"** he quipped.

Neil immediately offered a different, more striking comparison. **"Not really, more like a window glass cleaner in a high-rise building,"** he replied.

Adam, however, injected a note of pride into the conversation, putting an end to the comparison game. **"Whatever, I am still proud to be what we are as hotel workers anyway,"** he declared.

Meeting Mike

While we were busy laughing and **making fun of our new suits**, a knock sounded at the door. I answered it, and standing before me was a **chubby, well-shaven, curly-haired, dark-complexioned man** who appeared to be around 140 centimeters tall. He was wearing his own newly-issued uniform and introduced himself as **Mike**.

He held a piece of paper and, reading from it with a **firm, steady modulation**, he called out our names and room number to confirm his list.

Mike delivered his instructions in the same formal tone. **"You are all required to attend tomorrow's practical training at the training center,"** he announced.

"All right, we'll be there, as required. Thank you," I replied simply.

"Definitely, you must. See you there," he confirmed, then turned and walked away in an **orderly and distinctly debonair fashion**.

As Mike walked away, we couldn't help but **glance at his uncanny manner**—he was an extraordinary man with

unexpectedly **dazzling features** for someone delivering a logistics order. We didn't speak a word, but instead simply **looked at each other**, the shared glance acknowledging that we had all noticed something distinctly and surprisingly **different** about him.

Thoughts of Home

During those confining first few days in the camp, our minds were consumed by one thing: our **loved ones from our homeland**.

Everyone in the barracks was preoccupied, either **writing or reading letters**. When we weren't doing that, we always found the atmosphere in our rooms too **boring**, prompting us to convene again at the reception area. There, we watched television programs and exchanged brief pleasantries with our fellow workers.

The Burden of Humor

These occasional gatherings were meant to provide an outlet, letting **all types of sentiments and fun** emerge to relieve our **stress and emotional burden**.

However, the camaraderie often had a sharp edge. During certain instances, careless words and jokes—meant to be taken lightly by the speaker—landed as **heavy, painful insults** to our more **emotional and homesick** colleagues.

“Don’t think about your wives, they’re fine, and well-secured,” **Bonquito** quipped, attempting to amuse one of our fellow neighbors in the barracks. It was a joke intended to soothe, but it hung in the air, a harsh reminder of the vast distance separating us from our loved ones.

Everyone immediately **roared with laughter** at the joke.

Encouraged, Bonquito pressed the matter further, his voice carrying a heavier, more speculative tone. “**Who knows what your wives are doing right now? They might be out somewhere else, leaving the kids in the house with your moms.**”

A sudden wave of unease passed through the group. I looked at him, asking seriously, **“Are you okay?”**

“Yes, but I was just speculating,” he replied, attempting to lighten the mood he’d just darkened.

“Trust your wife, okay?” I advised simply, trying to put a firm stop to the dangerous line of thought.

“No, **don’t you ever think something ill about your wife**, or you’ll ruin your day!” Willy interjected sharply, trying to firmly shut down the doubt. “Trust your wife, and have faith in her.”

“That’s naive,” Adam countered immediately, folding his arms. **“It depends on what kind of person your wife is.** The thing is, you should *know* who your wife is before you make statements like that.”

Bonquito laughed, a bitter edge to the sound. “Hey, don’t be too confident! It’s **human nature to be lonely**, and with this distance, you’ll never know what may happen back home,” he insisted, doubling down on his cynical argument.

“You’re so negative, friend. You should know your wife,” Neil scolded, trying to bring the argument back to trust. **“Unless you don’t fully know her**, then maybe you should worry about the high possibility of what you are trying to insinuate actually happening.”

I then weighed in, offering a philosophical angle to the escalating debate. **“It depends if your woman is responsive to the call of her environment. When you leave her in a world that is prone to temptations, it is most likely that temptation would hang around her.”** The room grew heavier, the simple joke having become a serious reflection on fidelity and the price of absence.

“What exactly do you mean by that?” Bonquito immediately challenged.

“No, I don’t mean to personally offend anyone here, but I am simply stating a **fact**: an environment is a major contributor to temptation,” I declared, pushing the point. “This is especially

true when there are a **lot of idle men hanging around your neighborhood** who notice your attractive woman.”

His suspicion intensified. “Are you saying, explicitly, that my woman could actually be **tempted by those neighbors hanging around our place?**” he demanded.

“Of course, yes,” I asserted, doubling down on the harsh truth. “Especially when she’s going to a store with a **number of idle men hanging around**—she’s going to get spotted, and, well, you know how things go...”

“You’re directly **offending my friend!**” another voice immediately cut in, stepping in to defend Bonquito.

“No, friend, that’s simply a **reality** we have to face when we’re this far away,” I insisted.

At that, **Bonquito’s face turned sour and threatening.** He said nothing more but abruptly **spun around and stormed out of the room**, the tense silence he left behind proving that some wounds were too sensitive to be touched, even by speculation.

“What’s wrong with him?” I asked, genuinely confused by his sudden, furious exit.

Willy immediately offered the context: **“Bonquito lives in a populous area, a place called a slum. He felt insulted”** by the implication that the environment made his wife vulnerable.

“No, I truly didn’t mean to offend him, as I don’t know him personally,” I insisted, trying to defend my position. **“We were just exchanging our pleasantries and opinions, right?”**

“Why was he so annoyed?” someone else wondered aloud.

“He’s a difficult man, not sporting,” Neil declared dismissively, dismissing Bonquito’s reaction as an over-sensitivity.

Training Day: Practical Hospitality

The following day, we reported to the training center and immediately began our education. The curriculum was

extensive, focusing on **beddings and linen management**, general **utility and sanitation**, and even some basics of **food and beverage preparation**.

We were initiated by experienced hotel supervisors who first **demonstrated the proper ways** of performing all the required tasks. Afterward, the training became completely hands-on: we were immediately asked to perform every task **by ourselves**.

Specialized Electrical Training

However, as the designated **electrician**, I was immediately diverted from the general training and told to report to the **electrical room**.

Upon my arrival, I was instructed to perform some tasks involving **applied practical electricity and troubleshooting**. Fortunately, I was able to complete these assignments successfully with the crucial assistance of a **certified foreigner** who was highly experienced in troubleshooting and mentored me through the requirements.

Later that day, a new requirement was added to my duties: I was informed that I would also be expected to act as a **reliever room steward** whenever the primary steward was absent and a replacement was urgently needed. Because of this, I was required to attend the sessions to learn the essential tasks, including **beddings, linen changes, and all other related room stewardship duties**.

Confronted by Mike

During the training session, Mike suddenly emerged from the crowd and approached me, while Neil watched closely from a distance.

"I understand that you have no experience at all in the hotel industry," he stated flatly.

"How did you know that?" I asked, startled.

"It's not only you; you're just one among many," he explained, holding a list. "It just so happens that it was noted right here on the roster."

“So what’s the problem with that?” I challenged him.

Mike didn’t flinch. “Nothing,” he replied. “That’s precisely why we have this training now—for those who are not qualified and who, by chance, were luckily recruited without further screening.”

I couldn’t resist a jab. “By the way you talk, you’re really somebody here,” I said sarcastically.

He took the compliment seriously, a clear look of pride on his face. “I am just one of the supervisors who will be handling your tasks at the job site,” he proudly replied. “And I want my staff to be well-screened, of good moral character, and fully qualified for the job.”

“Are you sure of that?” I countered, the sarcasm fading as I felt the weight of his authority.

He held the list up, not answering my question directly. “Am I one of your staff?” he asked me.

“Your name is included together with your roommate, Neil, on the list given to me by Mr. Azurin,” he confirmed. “However, the two others, Adam and Willy, are assigned to somebody else I don’t know.”

He lowered the paper, offering a rare moment of reassurance. “I’ve got your details, and I understand your background. Don’t worry; this is just an initial stage of qualifying and notifying my prospective staff for the job site.”

“So what’s the big deal for us?” I asked, wanting to cut to the chase.

Mike became stern. “Nothing but to comply with the job requirements and respect my authority, so that we can maintain a harmonious job relationship,” he said. “It so happens that this is just my style of handling my staff.”

“No problem, we are good boys!” I assured him quickly.

“Good, see you there!” he replied. He then offered a slight smile before turning and disappearing quickly back into the noisy crowd of trainees.

Lunch After Training

When the training concluded that afternoon, the crowd immediately dispersed and proceeded to the mess hall for lunch. As we crossed the open space, the strong, cold wind persisted, whipping around us. We were so acutely hungry that we no longer cared about the taste of the meal; our sole priority was putting something—anything—into our rumbling stomachs.

Mike's Reputation

As we ate, Adam suddenly leaned in, his voice low and serious. “Beware of Mike. Don’t be confident with that fellow.”

He dropped a chilling warning: “He’s a hoodlum back home, a notorious gambler and swindler. He’s a close friend of Bonquito and a townmate. He was always in and out of jail. He’s a dangerous guy.”

“Really, how did you know that?” Neil asked, clearly stunned by the revelation.

“Someone he knew back home told our neighbor in the barracks,” Adam explained, “when they had a gambling session one night in their room.”

“But, he’s so **refined in his actuation** and serious in his talk,” I argued, trying to reconcile the rumor with the man we met. “**He’s introduced himself to us as our boss.**”

Willy’s response was a stern warning. “**If he’s your boss, then you need to be careful in dealing with him** because he’s already beginning to **befriend and assert his authority** over you, even when you’re not officially on the job site.”

“Do you mean to say that he will **impose on us**?” I asked, trying to grasp the scope of his warning.

“Definitely, yes, that’s why he has several friends already crowded into his accommodation,” Willy confirmed grimly. **“Even his own roommates aren’t spared from his modus operandi.”**

Willy then spelled out the immediate threat: **“He’s going to invite you to join a syndicate of gamblers, or he’ll corner you for some money if you don’t.** He’ll promise to repay you, but if he loses, forget about ever seeing that money again.”

“Do you mean to say that he will **impose on us?**” I asked, trying to grasp the scope of his warning.

“Definitely, yes, that’s why he has several friends already crowded into his accommodation,” Willy confirmed grimly. **“Even his own roommates aren’t spared from his modus operandi.”**

Willy then spelled out the immediate threat: **“He’s going to invite you to join a syndicate of gamblers, or he’ll corner you for some money if you don’t.** He’ll promise to repay you, but if he loses, forget about ever seeing that money again.”

“He’s a difficult guy,” Adam warned again, his voice conclusive.

“Anyway, thanks a lot for the warning. Now that we know about him, we’ll definitely be more careful in our dealings,” I replied, the new knowledge adding a layer of sudden, unwelcome complication to our work ahead.

The New Arrivals

That night, while we were eating our dinner, two large buses filled with new recruits arrived. The driver immediately escorted them into the mess hall for their meal.

They were apparently **Egyptian butlers and cooks**, along with some others who were allegedly **Arabs**, though we couldn’t tell their specific country of origin. Several of them shared tables with people of various nationalities, and four of them happened to join our table. They were noticeably **friendly and kind** in their demeanor

One of the new arrivals, who appeared to be the eldest, took the lead and introduced his companions as they each extended their hands to shake ours.

“Gentlemen, this is Abdullah, Ahmed, Moustafa, and I am Hassan,” Hassan stated.

We, in turn, introduced ourselves to them. **Hassan** had a fair complexion and stood almost six feet tall. The other three—**Abdullah, Ahmed, and Moustafa**—all had darker skin and long, curly hair. They were noticeably taller than us by two or three inches and possessed a medium build.

“I believe you are all Asians, right? **Filipini?**” Ahmed asked, using the common Arab pronunciation for Filipino.

“Yes, you are all welcome, and we are glad to know you as our **co-workers here in the summit conference,**” I replied warmly.

“Oh, yes, thank you. We hope to live in peace with everyone here,” said Hassan.

“Where did you come from?” Neil asked.

“My three colleagues come from **Africa,**” Hassan explained. “I, myself, come from the **Eastern part.**”

“You must all be quite the travelers. How did you meet?” I asked, curious about their shared history.

“They worked in a **five-star hotel in Egypt,** where I also worked before coming here,” Hassan answered readily.

The three other men—Abdullah, Ahmed, and Moustafa—remained quiet, calmly looking around the mess hall as they continued eating. They then subtly **glanced at each other,** an unspoken communication passing between their eyes.

Willy, sensing the shift in the atmosphere or perhaps just eager to leave, slowly tapped my leg under the table. **“Let them eat. We may want to leave now,”** he whispered.

“Gentlemen, excuse us, but we have to go now,” I told the group, sensing the need to leave.

“It’s okay. Bye, see you later,” Hassan replied easily.

The Mysterious Hand-Off

Eventually, Hassan and his company joined other colleagues. They were later directed to settle into their own quarters, as the people in the camp were systematically **segregated according to their nationality** for easier identification.

That night, **Hassan and Ahmed** decided to walk out of the room to relax outdoors under the **cold, clear skies and the bright moon**. As they chatted, an **unidentified man** in a **black jacket with a hood** suddenly approached them. The figure quickly handed one of them something contained in a **folded envelope**, then immediately turned and walked away, disappearing into the dark alley shaded by the trees.

Unidentified Origins

After receiving the mysterious item, the two men **hastily retreated back to their room**.

Later, as **Neil** and I walked toward our quarters, I raised the point that had been bothering me. **"Did you not notice something?"** I asked.

"What was it that we did not know?" Neil questioned.

"We never actually pinned down their country of origin," I explained. **"Hassan just told us he's from 'the eastern part,' and the other three are from 'Africa.'"**

"Oh, I see, yes. That's exactly what I was thinking right there," Willy chimed in.

"Hassan is from the eastern part of **which** country? The other three men were just in **Africa**?" That's incredible, and completely unclear!" I declared, a cloud of doubt settling over me. **"They are obscure men, right?"**

"Yes. They are **rude, unethical, and tactless**," Adam confirmed bluntly. "Anyway, forget about them for now. We must realize that this is a **multi-racial organization**, and we should accept that people here live by their own distinct values and beliefs."

“Exactly,” Neil agreed. **“We must become used to it and learn their values.”**

Chapter 3

An Arab Along the Road

Beyond the Gate

The following morning, though the weather remained extremely cold, it was at least fine. We bundled up in our sweaters and jogging shoes, intending to jog around the camp.

However, curiosity won out. After a few stretches, we walked over to the exit gate to see what lay on the other side. The sight was vast and desolate: a cascading desert land that stretched out toward the horizon. Distant areas were marked by isolated clusters of grown pine trees and date trees. We could make out a couple of isolated marble houses and what looked like a three-story factory building with unusual neon lights on its roof deck.

More intriguingly, about two kilometers away, we spotted a cluster of civilization: a six-story flat, several parked vehicles, and a small mini-mart. It was a glimpse of a world we were not allowed to enter, existing just beyond the perimeter of our confinement, and it made the isolation of the camp feel immediate and real.

The Unseen Car

Deciding to breach the camp's unofficial boundary, we stepped out and began walking toward the distant mini-mart, eager to find something new—like newspapers or different consumables. Preoccupied with our destination, we chose to walk on the smooth, asphalted surface of the road.

We were so focused on the road ahead that we failed to notice a sleek, white Mercedes-Benz that had suddenly emerged from the rear side, gaining speed as it approached us from behind.

We quickly realized the vehicle was a service car, a taxi, identifiable by the signage mounted on its roof. It matched our walking pace, rolling slowly alongside us. The driver, a mustached man wearing a traditional Arab white thawb (robe) and a matching white kaffiyeh (headdress), leaned his head out the window.

“Hey, Sadik, come on; ride with me,” he called out with a friendly smile, immediately recognizing me.

We were all startled when we looked at him. “No, it’s okay, we’re stretching,” I said, declining the ride.

He continued to drive slowly alongside us. “I believe you’re from the camp for the Islamic conference,” he stated. He then immediately shifted the topic to something far more serious. “Did you know that we’re having a difficult time with Saddam?” he asked.

“Yes, we did, that’s why we’re here to serve them,” Willy confirmed.

“Was it real that he’s going to invade Kuwait?” Neil asked, giving voice to the chilling rumor that had shadowed our journey.

A Kuwaiti baker named Yusuf expressed his certainty that an invasion was imminent, driven by the invader’s financial desperation. He told Neil that while the exact timing was unknown, the danger was clear from the frequent border intrusions and the nightly sounds of bombardment and gunfire. He then introduced himself and gave Neil his business card.

"Do you think it's still safe to work and live here?" I asked.

"It's not a matter of 'if,' but 'when' he invades," the man explained. "His economy is collapsing, and he's after our wealth." "And you think it's soon?" I asked. "Very soon," he said, sighing with anxiety. "We just don't know the day. They're already at the border. We hear the gunfire and explosions every night. They won't stop until they are in our houses." He then switched topics, offering a hand. "I'm Yusuf, a Kuwaiti. I run a bakery in the souk." He found his wallet and gave me his business card.

"No. My countrymen are scrambling, fleeing to the UK. They're terrified. Every news bulletin, every sound at night... they jump. We all know the border is being tested, but the real fear is who might have already slipped through."

"And you? Are you getting out?" I asked.

His eyes scanned the market. "I have to. But it's not that simple."

A cold dread settled on me. "If they're already in," I said, lowering my voice, "they could be anywhere. Right here in this city. Watching. Waiting. Planning God knows what."

"All right, Sadik," he said, his tone clipped and serious. "You have my card. I hope to God this conference is successful, but more than that, I hope it's safe. If you get into trouble, if *anything* feels wrong before the summit, you come to that address. Don't hesitate."

He didn't say goodbye. He just put the car in gear, his eyes already scanning the street. "Be careful."

The engine roared, and he sped away, leaving us standing on the curb.

"I still have the awful sense he was right: this nation is going to be **invaded**." **Neil**: "That's a terrifying assertion. What evidence do you have?" "The continuing **border incursions**. They won't pause the attacks even for the summit. They have no intention of honoring a cease-fire." **Willy**: "Yet **Saddam** himself is en route for the peace talks. Doesn't that count for anything?" **Neil**: "It's a distraction. We are seconds away from catastrophe; a **disastrous event** could detonate at any moment." "And who is holding the detonator? We don't know if **agents** are already in the crowds, or if one of *us* is here to **sabotage** the whole thing," I warned. **Adam**: "That line of thought is counterproductive. You have to shut down the negativity and focus on the **positive** outcome."

We walked on, our intense conversation about threats and cease-fires consuming our focus, so much so that we practically stumbled into the small, brightly lit newsstand attached to the mini-mart. The scent of stale coffee and newsprint hit us first.

I automatically reached for the nearest English-language broadsheet. The paper was heavy in my hands, but the bold, black lettering of the lead story instantly drained the warmth from my chest. I read it aloud, the words slicing through the late morning air: "**IRAQI INTRUSION PROVOKES GUN BATTLE ON THE BORDER.**"

The sheer, sudden validation of our worst fears—of the "invasion" we'd just debated and the "disastrous event" Neil had predicted—was horrifying. Yusuf's earlier warning about sabotage now felt less like paranoia and more like immediate reality. A silent, shared shock passed through us. We couldn't stay there, standing under the indifferent neon lights. The escalating **border incursion** and the inescapable certainty of **havoc** now loomed over the entire summit. Disturbed and serious, we turned abruptly and began the anxious, hurried walk back to the safety of the camp.

We stepped into our quarters' reception area only to find the fear universally confirmed. Neighbors were fixed on the television, where an English news report detailed the **border intrusion**. The shocking news dominated every conversation, injecting pure **terror** into the atmosphere. This crisis was overwhelming for us—**young, naive, prone to collapse**, and utterly unprepared for violence. We felt acutely **vulnerable and small**. More disturbing still was the reaction of the hotel staff: the crisis had so profoundly **shaken and disheartened** them that their own fear amplified our sense that control had been completely lost.

Government Response and Security Lockdown

As a direct result of the intrusion, the government immediately declared a **full military alert** across the entire state, covering all land, airspace, and territorial waters.

The security measures were sweeping:

- **Entry Points Secured:** All entry points, excluding the main airport, were instantly reinforced. **Roving military personnel** established a presence to conduct **thorough inspections and frisks** of all incoming individuals, with **no exceptions**, focusing particularly on **aliens** (non-citizens).
- **Military Fortification: Reinforcements** and equipment were swiftly deployed to **strategic points along the border**.
- **Counter-Infiltration:** Operatives were mobilized to **track and intercept suspicious movements** of arriving aliens for immediate questioning. Individuals who **resisted** this process were to be **arrested** on the spot.

The state was effectively placed under a high-alert **military lockdown** to prevent any further infiltration or escalation.

The escalation of border incursions triggered an urgent, high-level military response. To stabilize the region and closely monitor developments, the President of the United States ordered the massive aircraft carrier USS Dwight Eisenhower to maintain a menacing maneuver in the Gulf. This display of power did little to calm our quarters. Though we avoided our jobsite, the news had inflicted profound damage: several of the young men were now severely disturbed and shaken, gripped by acute paranoia and mental anguish. The fear had successfully breached their resolve, rendering them useless—their ambition and interest in their assigned work completely destroyed.

The sight was a stark illustration of our collective dread. Just in the immediate vicinity of the camp, a distressed tableau had formed. A young man, his face blotchy and slick with tears, was in the throes of a hysterical breakdown. He had clearly decided he was leaving: his traveling bag was already slung haphazardly around his shoulder, a desperate symbol of flight.

His frantic urgency was met by the grim necessity of his fellow workers, who had him tightly held. They were trying to pacify and restrain him—an impossible task against the tide of his fear. It was evident that the simple paranoia over the looming horror of war had snapped his mental fortitude. His weeping and wild movements were not just sorrow; they were pure, uncontrolled hysteria, proving that the conflict was already inflicting casualties far from the actual border.

Here is a detailed expansion of the dialogue, focusing on the heightened emotional state, the specific arguments being used, and the atmosphere of panic.

The chaotic scene intensified as the first man tried to physically contain the one dissolving into grief. "Stop crying, bro. **Everything is okay here!** Control yourself," the man urged, his own voice tight with barely suppressed fear. "Nothing bad will happen. You're fine."

The weeping man fought his restraint, his sobs ragged. "**No!** I want to go home, to be with my family *before* the attack comes here. We'll all die here! **I tell you!** Please, you have to let me go home," he pleaded, his eyes wide and vacant with panic, likely convinced that every second he remained was a death sentence.

A second, more confrontational voice cut through the despair. "No, you're absolutely wrong! That whole story is a **piece of fake news**, a rumor. It's not coming here. **Nothing bad is going to happen here!**" he insisted, perhaps lying to himself as much as to his friend, desperately clinging to denial.

The hysterical man ignored the counter-argument, his focus narrowing to escape. "Please! I need to talk to John Peterson! He's the one who can arrange this. **I want to go back home!**" he cried out, his voice a frantic, cracking shriek.

It was impossible to stand by any longer. Recognizing the rapid descent into chaos, **Neil and I then approached them**, stepping directly into the scene of escalating panic.

Here is a detailed and tense rewrite of the dialogue, focusing on the character's attempt to exert control and the raw anxiety of the weeping man.

I stepped quickly into the frantic circle, my tone sharp and commanding to cut through the rising hysteria. "What exactly is happening here, good fellows?" I demanded, glancing from the man trying to restrain the weeper to the man pleading for calm.

The first man, sweating slightly, gestured helplessly at the distraught figure. "He's completely lost it. He's scared because of all the rumors—the talk about the invasion and war coming here."

I turned my focus entirely to the crying man, adopting a firm, reassuring posture. "Friend, listen to me closely," I said, projecting absolute certainty. "We are all safe here. You have to trust that. Believe me, you cannot panic now; there is no truth about war affecting this camp. Everything is under control by the government forces." I leaned in slightly, lowering my voice to a more confidential pitch. "When worse comes to worst, when the situation is genuinely critical, then the management will ask us all to leave safely. Is that understood?"

He wasn't placated. He shook his head violently, his face a mask of exhaustion and terror. "But I cannot sleep!" he choked out, his voice desperate. "I am completely overwhelmed by this anxiety—I keep seeing the worst-case scenario over and over."

"Then you must trust in something bigger than your fear," I countered, softening my voice slightly to offer a final measure of calm. "Just pray, and try to rest. Your friends here will help you, and they will absolutely not leave you." I then gave a final, decisive instruction to his coworkers, pulling rank through sheer confidence. "Okay. You may bring him back to the room and stay with him." With the immediate crisis delegated, Neil and I immediately turned and left the scene, the sound of the man's ragged breathing echoing in our retreat.

Here is a detailed and serious rewrite of the scene, emphasizing the worsening panic and the shocking revelation about the crying man.

Escalating Panic and a Troubling Revelation

We continued down the path, only to encounter another terrifying repetition of the first scene. Just ahead, we found two more men struggling. One had his bag packed and was pulling away, while the other was frantically trying to stop and appease him. The crisis was spreading like an infection.

Neil stepped forward immediately, his voice strained with urgency. "What's the problem, men?" he demanded.

The man attempting to restrain his friend was pale. "He wants to see the airport. He's fixated on getting out—he wants to go home now," he explained, his eyes darting with anxiety.

The agitated man began to sob openly. "I will ask John Peterson to send me home. I don't want to die here, I want to be with my family," he cried out, his fear entirely focused on escape.

I focused on the coworker. "Do you know him personally?" I asked, trying to find a root cause for this panic beyond simple fear.

The coworker leaned in, his voice dropping to a harsh, troubled whisper. "Yes, he's my personal friend from Manila. He used to take, you know, unwanted drugs... he needs it during this kind of situation," he confided, the revelation hanging heavy in the air. The man wasn't just panicked; he was experiencing a psychological crisis tied to a dangerous dependency.

Faced with a problem far beyond our ability to fix—a complex blend of fear, withdrawal, and mania—we realized we were powerless. We could not help, and with a sense of defeat, we were forced to let them go. We then proceeded grimly to the administration office, where John Peterson held his office and where our immediate priority was to secure our identification cards amidst the chaos.

The brief administrative task was handled by a **Yemeni clerk**, a man likely in his late twenties or early thirties, whose expression was weary but professional. He quickly issued us our official, **laminated identification cards**. They were starkly serious documents, featuring our **\$2 \times 2\$ colored ID photo** next to text printed entirely in dense **Arabic letters**. These cards were not mere formalities; they were a mandatory security measure. We were strictly instructed to **pin the ID** to the **upper right side of our uniform** at all times while on duty, an immediate and clear sign that we were now operating under the state's stringent military alert.

We found **John Peterson** presiding over an emergency assembly of supervisors and managers. The sole, grim agenda item was the immediate **impact of the current border crisis**. We recognized instantly that this issue demanded **serious consideration**, not just for its military threat, but because of its crippling **psychological effect** on the staff. The most terrifying rumor was the core of our anxiety: the possibility that **Iraqi infiltrators** were already on-site, specifically planning to **sabotage the entire summit meeting at the center**. If successful, this act would be the trigger for the worst-case scenario: a full-scale **invasion and a bloody war**. The meeting wasn't about work schedules; it was about survival.

The pervasive **imploring grief** of the shaken and panicky young men had become a critical internal problem, dangerously distracting the entire administration office. Their hysteria was now a liability.

In an urgent move to stop the psychological bleeding, **J. Peterson** summoned all hotel workers for a mandatory emergency meeting. His primary, critical goal was to **console and appease** the staff, focusing especially on the young men who were clearly **psychologically paralyzed** by the unfolding events.

He began immediately, his voice cutting through the heavy, anxious silence of the room. **"I called this meeting to announce to everyone, especially the affected young boys here, not to panic and fear the ongoing situation!"** Peterson paused, letting the severity of his tone sink in. "I assure you, we are all secure here. There is **no danger of invasion now.**" His final word hung in the air—a temporary guarantee meant to calm them, but which subtly confirmed that danger remained a future possibility.

Peterson's voice was sharp, a desperate anchor in a sea of fear. **"The reason why we are all here is singular and vital: to serve the leaders of these nations who are gathering right now to settle the dispute in this region!"** He paused for dramatic effect. **"There is no truth about war!"**

He then hammered the point with an aggressive logic designed to shame their fears. "Think! How could there possibly be an invasion when the **leaders of the conflicting nations are coming here for a meeting?** How could they authorize such an attack when their own heads of state are present on this soil? It is absurd!"

His tone immediately shifted from reassurance to harsh authority. "I tell you plainly: **we shall finish this contract.** Our obligation ends when the summit meeting is over, not a day before. **Nobody will be going back home early.** We are legally and morally obliged to comply with the terms of the contract, whether we like the current situation or not." His final directive was an order, not a suggestion. **"Stay calm, focus, and keep yourselves busy. Stop this destructive cycle of thinking about war and invasion!"**

Immediately following Peterson's tense address, Charles took charge. He bypassed all normal protocol, issuing a direct, chilling instruction for our supervisors to conduct an urgent

orientation on emergency procedures and defense against attack. This was no drill; it was a desperate safety precaution.

Our own unit head, visibly strained, delivered the instructions, his words clearly being guided and dictated by Charles, whose presence loomed over the briefing.

"Listen closely," the unit head announced, his voice tight. "In the event of an attack—by air or by land—you must immediately run to the pre-designated safe areas of the conference center and hotel. Crucially, find areas with windows or exits that will allow for immediate escape if necessary."

He stressed a vital, tactical contradiction: "However, you must not run toward the open air. Instead, you will hide in the covered, sheltered areas." He then emphasized survival basics: "Try to always carry a bottle of water. That is absolutely necessary in times of chaos and panic. And do not forget this: when you hear gunshots, you must kneel flat on the floor—get as low as possible to avoid being hit by stray bullets."

The stark, specific details of kneeling to avoid gunfire turned the abstract threat into a terrifying, immediate reality.

The Morning Rush

The routine of the camp started abruptly, shattering the stillness. As usual, the transport **buses were idling and ready**, their diesel engines rumbling a monotonous rhythm. Cutting through the noise, the **bus dispatcher** began his signature, impatient call, the familiar sound a command to movement: "**Yallah, Sadik, the bus is leaving! Wake up! Wake up!**"

We moved instantly. Clutching our **bath towels and soap**, we hurried toward the main ablutions block—a **spacious, institutional bathroom** equipped with a line of **water sprinklers** and a powerful **heater**, capable of accommodating a

large number of men simultaneously. The air was thick with steam and chlorine. After a quick, functional wash, we rushed back to the room, quickly pulling on our standard **uniforms** and ensuring our **shoes were well-polished** and gleaming for the day ahead.

By **six o'clock sharp**, we were assembled in the **mess hall**, silently eating our functional breakfast.

Thirty minutes later, the final call came. We boarded the bus, pulling on our **jackets or sweaters** over our uniforms. The temperature outside was a constant hazard; we knew we had to be completely covered to protect ourselves from the **extremely cold wind**. Without the layers, the brutal **frost would bite our exposed skin** and painfully **harden our legs** before we even reached the jobsite.

Here is a detailed expansion of the scene, focusing on the abrupt stop and the specific, tense visual details of the military personnel and their gear.

The Military Interception

After exactly **thirty tense minutes of travel** along the clean, **asphalted road**, our journey was violently interrupted. An **APC (Armored Personnel Carrier)**, a low, menacing armored vehicle, suddenly materialized and cut off our bus, forcing the driver to brake sharply. An intimidating army of **four soldiers**—all clad in **camouflage fatigues** and gripping **assault rifles**—disembarked from the carrier.

They were instantly identifiable and deeply intimidating. Each man wore a crisp uniform bearing the unmistakable markers of their authority: a **Kuwaiti flag patch** was displayed proudly below their left and right shoulders, and a distinct **insignia**—where the words "**Kuwaiti Royal Defense Force**" were **embroidered in detail** onto a patch of cloth—was affixed to the

upper right corner of their chests. Every face was grim, framed by thick, severe **mustaches** that added to their air of rigid professionalism. The sight of the armed, uniformed men emerging from the APC brought an immediate, palpable silence to the bus.

Two of the soldiers immediately boarded the bus. The tension became instant and suffocating as they began their inspection, the **barrels of their assault rifles pointed heedlessly at every passenger**. Their movements were aggressive; they stomped down the aisle, checking **beneath the seats** and scrutinizing anyone who carried anything that might warrant **suspicion**.

Every one of us was frozen, holding our breath, our eyes locked on the chaotic movement of the guns. We remained **silent and acutely anxious**, painfully aware of the thin line between this routine search and outright disaster. Every inspection became a terrifying gamble: a **randomly pointed barrel**, the slight twitch of a soldier's finger, a **bad move**—any one of which could lead to a round accidentally blowing out, irrevocably shattering the calm. The inspection felt less like a search and more like a high-stakes, involuntary standoff.

Finally, the soldiers concluded their sweep. They stepped down, offered a quick, curt signal, and allowed the driver to move the bus along, leaving us physically unharmed but psychologically battered.

Chapter 4

Payday, May Day

Payday: The Armored Ritual

The following day brought a brief, tense relief from the crisis: it was payday. We were scheduled to collect our second payout, a highly secure operation managed by a large, specialized financial firm. The money arrived via the formidable armored van of Securicor (Security Corporation), the Kuwaiti financial company that had been contracted by the Kuwait Hotels Company to handle the complex computation and disbursement of payroll for all hotel personnel.

The disbursement ritual took place in the mess hall, and it was Securicor's second time managing the payroll there. We quickly found the process to be exceptionally time-consuming and frustrating. The requirement meant that we had to completely sacrifice an entire day's work, instead spending hours queueing in the cavernous hall. The wait was compounded by the stressful and annoying presence of a massive crowd, a volatile mix of workers representing various nationalities, all equally desperate to receive their wages amidst the escalating political tension. The sheer inefficiency of the process made the earned money feel hardly worth the drawn-out ordeal.

Thus, the friction created a commotion, which prompted the paymaster to stop the payroll disbursements. Security personnel tried to appease the angry party and separate them. However, the offended Egyptians went out of the mess hall in frustration and anger. Hence, the order in the mess hall was restored.

Payday Erupts: The International Incident

The process was a grueling test of endurance. We were forced to physically and emotionally struggle through a massive, disorganized line composed of rude and unruly people as the payroll personnel slowly called out names to receive their pay envelopes.

In such a tight, high-stress environment, an incident was inevitable. As the crowd jostled, it was impossible to avoid people accidentally jerking, shuddering, or wrenching others. A group of Egyptians, standing in the already unorganized and disarrayed queue of other Asian nationalities, were jostled by one such movement. With their patience already frayed by the overwhelming political stress, they immediately lost their composure. The angriest among them, instantly assuming they were being ridiculed or deliberately insulted, retaliated with sudden, violent force, turning the minor jostle into a dangerous and explosive international confrontation.

Riot Inside the Camp: Resentment Brews

The fallout from the payroll line was immediate and poisonous. The angry Egyptians retreated to their quarters, their dignity wounded and their minds festering with bitter resentment toward the Filipinos with whom they'd had the altercation. It had been a profoundly humiliating day for them, and although some of their peers attempted to console them, a small, agitated band within their group grew increasingly restless. Fueled by pride and the overwhelming stress of the surrounding political crisis, they plotted a drastic, violent move—a collective act intended to crush any perceived disrespect, prove their superiority, and forcefully defend their wounded honor.

Meanwhile, back in the Filipino quarters, the atmosphere was one of forced calm. At seven o'clock in the evening, having finished a tense dinner, we promptly returned to our rooms,

seeking rest before the next day's duties. As a shield against the day's anxiety, I turned on a piece of my favorite soft music—a deliberate attempt to sweeten my sleep and drown out the mounting unease—while my friends kept to themselves, exchanging quiet conversation in their beds. The peace, however, felt fragile and temporary.

The Night Shatters

All of a sudden, the fragile tranquility of the night was brutally shattered. A deafening commotion erupted, originating somewhere deep within the mess hall complex. The sound was not just shouting; it was a terrifying, rolling roar, like a stampede—a rhythmic thunder that seemed to shake the very ground even from a distance.

We could distinctly hear the clamoring throng of men in anger surging forward. Then, the attack reached us directly. We heard the sharp, shocking sounds of falling stones—first, a few impacts above the roof, then a barrage that began aggressively hitting the walls of our quarters. The attack was immediate and deliberate. Astounded and propelled by instinct, we simultaneously leapt out of our beds and quickly rushed to the hallway to try and comprehend the sudden, violent chaos that had engulfed the camp.

Hallway Chaos

The hallway instantly became a corridor of pure panic. We saw **everyone coming out of their quarters**, propelled by surprise, their faces contorted with raw **fright and confusion**. People were moving aimlessly, clutching door frames or tripping over themselves in a daze.

Desperate for information, I grabbed the shoulder of a man who was already running past me, his eyes wide and **bewildered**. "**What's happening!?**" I demanded, trying to stop him.

He wrenched free, his voice a choked, terrified cry that barely registered above the distant clamor. "**The Egyptians are attacking us!**" he screamed, immediately accelerating his run down the hall to seek any available refuge.

The source of the attack hit me with stunning, sickening clarity. It wasn't the Iraqis, it was an internal riot fueled by resentment. "**What?!**" I shouted, the single word a mix of disbelief and instant strategic thinking. "**Let's go back to the room!**" We spun around instantly, realizing the danger was not outside the camp, but now inside our immediate shelter.

Hiding from the Hail of Stone

Total panic erupted. Everyone instantly scampered, desperate to find their respective concealment to avoid the relentless hail of falling stones coming from different directions. Our room became a tense, makeshift bunker. We kept absolutely vigilant inside, carefully approaching the glass window to peek out, knowing the glass offered only fragile protection.

The scene outside was chaos. We saw large groups of Filipinos and Egyptians organized on two terrifyingly opposite sides, locked in a vicious confrontation. They were casting stones at each other with violent urgency, while others were ducking and concealing themselves behind structures, desperately prioritizing safety over aggression. The camp had been completely fractured into warring factions, and the danger was immediate, unpredictable, and rapidly closing in.

Escalation and Management Retreat

The situation spiraled entirely out of control. The **outnumbered security personnel** were completely incapable of stopping the violent clash between the two sides. Desperate to regain order, they were **prompted to fire warning shots** into the air—a drastic measure that, shockingly, failed to deter the rioters. The

battle continued unabated. Everywhere, people were being **injured**, sustaining **bruises and gashes** from the relentless barrage of thrown stones.

While the riot raged, the security police immediately notified the top management. **John Peterson and Charles** were fully informed of the violent confrontation. However, rather than intervening, they made a calculated, self-preserving decision: they **did not go out to the scene**. Their priority was avoiding the inevitable danger of being **hit by the intense clashes** between the two hostile ethnic groups. They chose to manage the crisis from a protected distance, leaving the security personnel to face the raw hostility alone.

Police Intervention Called

Observing the complete failure of his own staff to contain the chaos, J. Peterson made the critical, immediate decision to escalate. Upon assessing the uncontrollable situation, he realized only external force could halt the violence. He wasted no time, immediately contacting the Safat police headquarters and issuing an urgent plea for reinforcement. The internal camp security had officially collapsed.

Meanwhile, trapped inside our small room, we remained terrifyingly vigilant. Every sense was heightened as we listened to the continued riot outside—we could sense the raw, unpredictable movements of the madmen beyond our door. The minutes dragged with a desperate urgency as we waited for the sounds of either the riot subsiding or the police sirens approaching.

Within a matter of minutes—though it felt like an eternity—the deafening sirens of numerous police cars ripped through the chaos, signaling their arrival at the camp. The heavily armed policemen immediately moved to crush the riot, wasting no time. They fired several warning shots into the air, the sharp

reports a final, authoritative punctuation mark to the violence. This decisive show of force was enough: the remaining rioters instantly scattered to hide and escape arrest.

The police quickly secured the camp. The furious hostility was immediately and effectively abated, and a strained, fragile peace was restored.

In the wake of the battle, medics arrived in their ambulances. They moved swiftly to treat the numerous injured victims on the spot, stabilizing those with cuts and bruises. Critically, those who had sustained serious injuries were loaded into the ambulances and rushed to the hospital, a grim testament to the destructive power of the evening's violent, internal conflict.

The operation shifted immediately from crowd control to enforcement. The **police moved decisively**, identifying and **arresting those individuals** they caught attempting to flee or still hiding nearby. These detainees were swiftly placed under guard and **transported to the police station** for processing.

Simultaneously, management launched an internal inquiry. **Charles** issued urgent instructions to his assistants to conduct a meticulous **inventory** of every person involved in the riot. Their primary focus was tracking down the **names of the individuals who were arrested**, but also documenting anyone suspected of participation, creating a comprehensive internal record of the camp's upheaval.

Aftermath: Seeds of Revenge

Only after we were absolutely certain that the hostility had subsided and the camp was quiet again did we venture out. The atmosphere remained thick with tension, and we immediately

saw clusters of fellows huddled together, intensely discussing the incident in hushed, serious tones.

From their conversations, the grim truth emerged: the riot had been a calculated act of revenge. We learned that the offended Egyptians involved in the earlier mess hall and payroll incident had deliberately sparked the trouble, launching an attack indiscriminately against their ethnic adversaries immediately after dinner. The violence was not spontaneous; it was a targeted act of retribution.

The revelation hardened our caution. Neil spoke first, his voice low and stark. "We have to be extra careful now with the Egyptians. That was not a random fight."

Adam agreed, his expression troubled. "We don't know what resides in their hearts and minds, but at this point, we can only assume it's hatred and a desire for revenge." The incident had transformed the camp from a tense workplace into a landscape of deep, dangerous ethnic hostility.

Willy injected a strained note of optimism into the heavy atmosphere. "Let's just think positively," he insisted, though his own expression lacked conviction. "We have to believe everything will be settled, and that they—the Egyptians—will simply make up their minds in due time to stop the hostilities." His words were less a prediction and more a plea for normalcy.

I responded with cautious, tempered hope, acknowledging the necessity of change without offering false guarantees. "We can only hope they will realize their mistakes," I stated, the implication being that such a realization would require a significant, internal shift the groups might not be ready for. The conversation ended on a note of fragile uncertainty, the peace of the camp entirely dependent on the future actions of men driven by pride and revenge.

The Day After: Tense Aftermath

The following morning at the jobsite, a thick blanket of apprehension hung over the workforce. All pretense of normalcy had vanished; everyone was covertly talking about the violent incident that had erupted the night before. The focus was less on the border crisis and more on the deep, internal ethnic rupture that had just been exposed.

Meanwhile, the ripple effect reached the highest levels of management. J. Peterson was immediately summoned by the police authorities to address the fallout. This was not a simple meeting; it was a high-stakes negotiation intended to settle the volatile dispute between the two hostile ethnic groups and mitigate a public relations disaster. Leveraging his connections and authority, Peterson engaged in delicate political maneuvering. He was eventually able to secure the release of the hotel staff who had been arrested and detained by the police, successfully retrieving the workers despite their involvement in the riot. This feat, while maintaining staff numbers, underscored the management's desperate need to bury the incident and quickly restore order.

Diplomatic Intervention and Deepening Divide

To manage the diplomatic fallout from the riot, J. Peterson and Charles immediately escalated the crisis. They arranged an urgent meeting with foreign officials by dispatching formal invitation letters to the consular offices of Egypt and our own country, requesting their respective ambassadors to personally visit the camp. The goal was to involve high-level officials in addressing the ethnic conflict and settling the unrest among their nationals.

However, the damage was already done. The core issue of the conflict had permanently soured our relations with the Egyptians in the camp, transforming the workplace into a hostile environment. This internal crisis only added to our existing anxiety about the border threat. The tension was most acute at the jobsite, where our daily lives intersected with the very people who resented us: our co-workers included the Egyptian butlers and cooks, who were constantly a reminder of the hierarchy, as they were considered superior to us in rank. The threat was no longer just external; it was simmering dangerously within our walls.

Nuance Amidst Hostility

In the midst of this overwhelming ethnic hostility, a critical distinction had to be made. We held onto the belief that **not all Egyptians shared the same vengeful mentality**. Indeed, some individuals remained entirely **civil**, making it clear they would **not take the incident personally** or hold us accountable for the actions of others. However, we also knew that this civility was fragile. Even among the less confrontational individuals, some were **surely still irked**—their simmering resentment fueled by the specific, earlier **individual conflict** at the mess hall and the deeper, underlying **personal differences** that existed before the riot. The atmosphere was a volatile mix of professional necessity, genuine goodwill, and deep, unaddressed personal anger.

Diplomatic Resolution and Restored Peace

The crisis was finally diffused through decisive **diplomatic intervention**. Both **our ambassador and the Egyptian ambassador** convened to address the volatile issue. Crucially, while the matter was serious, the two foreign offices worked to ensure the incident **did not affect our broader diplomatic relations** with the host country.

The ambassadors took swift control, summoning their respective nationals who held **key supervisory positions** within the hotel to an official meeting. The case was formally **handled amicably**, allowing both hostile sides to achieve a public **reconciliation**. This high-level intervention proved effective: **since that meeting**, there were **no further conflicts or violent encounters** for the remainder of the contract.

As a final act of appeasement and goodwill, the men who had been **arrested and detained for a day** were given special consideration. With the direct **courtesy of John Peterson** and the influence of their **respective envoys**, steps were taken to smooth over their records, effectively bringing an official end to the dangerous internal turmoil.

It was exceptionally **rarely traumatic** for any individual to encounter the large-scale **political problems with different ethnic groups** in the state. However, the more common and insidious threat came from within our own ranks: the actions of **defiant fellow men** who were fueled by deep-seated **personal sentiments** and were constantly engaged in attempts to **pull each other down**.

The primary motivation for this destructive internal conflict was a toxic **human factor**: a profound resentment and the deliberate intent **not to let others get ahead of them**. This corrosive jealousy acted as a constant undercurrent of tension. This social reality, however, was not universal; the intensity of these power struggles and personal attacks often **depended entirely on the type of persons** the perpetrators were targeting—the weak were often victimized, while the strong were treated with cautious deference.

Chapter 5

Job at First Site

Arrival at the Fortress

Within an hour, we arrived at the jobsite: an **elevated and rugged expanse of rocky terrain**. The entire location felt less like a workplace and more like a high-security military installation. The **rocky portion** that isolated the fortress's **façade** was tightly guarded at its sole entrance by **uniformed men**, each armed with **sophisticated, heavy-caliber weapons**. Adding to the atmosphere of menace, the **watchtowers** positioned at all four corners of the fort housed powerful **high-powered searchlights** and menacing **machine guns**.

We stepped down from the bus, the reality of the lockdown immediately apparent, and began to **form a disciplined single file line** at the gate. As we entered, our orderly formation was necessary not just for crowd control, but for security: we were required to **pass through a metal detector**, a cold, routine acknowledgement that our presence was viewed with suspicion even as we prepared to work.

The Fortress of Diplomacy: The Conference Center

The conference center was strategically situated in the Southern part of Kuwait, deliberately isolated and remote, approximately twenty-one kilometers (thirteen miles) away from Camp Reggae. The entire complex was a monument to the host nation's commitment, having been lavishly sponsored and financed by the state of Kuwait specifically for high-stakes summit meetings.

This newly built center represented the pinnacle of modern, secure architecture. It was electronically equipped from floor to ceiling with the latest high-tech gadgets and electronic fixtures, designed to not only protect its occupants but to secure and monitor all activities in every corner of the vast building.

Its exterior security was even more formidable than its interior technology. The entire complex was surrounded and protected by a fortified, towering concrete-walled fence, which stood an imposing twenty feet in height. The walls were designed to deter any ground assault. Furthermore, the fence's perimeter was covered by powerful watchtowers at every corner, each electronically outfitted with a terrifying array of defense systems: advanced surveillance cameras, intense high-powered searchlights, and permanently mounted, sophisticated machine guns. The center was less a venue and more an impenetrable fortress.

Journey Through the Desert

The journey itself consumed more than an hour, carrying us deep into a landscape defined by its stark beauty. We traveled through the midst of cascading desert land, a sweeping, immense wilderness that sometimes made the trip an adventure, as visibility could be suddenly hampered by swirling, violent sandstorms. Along the wide, empty stretches of road, the signs of human life were incredibly scarce: only a few marble-made houses appeared, gleaming unnaturally white and standing isolated far from each other, lonely monuments against the endless tan earth.

The infrastructure was surprisingly modern. The roads were smoothly asphalted and vast, wide enough that the concept of traffic was nonexistent. Our bus moved swiftly, encountering only a scattering of other moving vehicles on the long stretches of highway and overpasses—a striking contrast that created a

sense of wonder at the quiet, desolate scale of the world outside the camp. It felt like traversing a vast, empty stage.

The Gauntlet of the Royal Guard

The sudden, routine halt to our journey became a daily gauntlet of fear. The constant act of frisking and inspection by the uniformed men—their gun barrels aimed heedlessly—never stopped creating a raw, sickening surge of anxiety and stress among us every time the bus slowed for the checkpoints.

The military presence was suffocating: royal guards were assigned to posts at every single kilometer, an unbroken, armed line stretching across the highways and deep into the city. Their mission was clear and terrifying: to prevent saboteurs or infiltrators from slipping into the state ahead of the forthcoming Islamic Conference. We were driving through a land locked down for war, and with a hostile rifle pointed in your face, the difference between a routine check and a fatal mistake felt thinner than glass. Every passage was a thrilling gamble against the twitch of a nervous finger.

The Summit's Luxurious Quarters

Clustered near the fortified conference center were specialized hotel buildings, erected and designed exclusively to house the heads of state and distinguished guests attending the high-level summit. Far from simple accommodations, the rooms were masterpieces of extravagance, elegantly and luxuriously designed and decorated to project wealth and sophistication.

The interiors glittered with opulence. Every detail was curated with expense in mind:

Metallic Finishes: We saw gold-plated accessories and elaborate bronze fixtures everywhere, including dazzling doorknobs and ornate bathroom fittings.

Decor and Furnishings: The lighting was provided by magnificent chandeliers adorned with glittering gems. Kitchens were stocked with valuable wares, and the living spaces featured antiquated figurines, striking paintings, and richly detailed furniture.

These items were not locally sourced; they were distinctively imported, mostly from European countries, underscoring the host nation's intent to display global prestige and spare no expense for its elite guests.

The sheer volume of wealth was a blatant tantalization, an open invitation to opportunism. The rooms' expensive furnishings and valuable fixtures created such an overwhelming display of luxury that it was no surprise when, on one occasion, a naughty hotel staff member was caught pocketing spares—small, portable treasures—directly from the stored cases of accessories.

Countering this temptation was an uncompromising security system. The ceilings of the hallways were lined with surveillance cameras, their lenses constantly sweeping and recording. These feeds were funneled into a central security hub, where personnel manned the monitors 24/7. Their sole, relentless task was to monitor and secure the inflow of both high-profile guests and working staff within the closely guarded perimeters, ensuring the integrity of the fortress-like complex.

Escalating Fear

As the date for the crucial summit drew nearer, the external threat intensified, magnifying the danger of terrorists' infiltration on the border. This wasn't merely a political concern;

it had become a source of daily, paralyzing dread. The growing anxiety consumed us day and night, stemming directly from the fear of being harassed, interrogated, and potentially arrested by the uniformed military personnel at every checkpoint. The simple, repeated act of passing through security checkpoints disheartened us to the point of exhaustion. The entire issue of terrorism had stopped being an abstract threat; it had devolved into a full-blown paranoia that dominated our thoughts, ensuring that the tension across the entire border region remained constantly heightened.

The Exodus

The fear transformed into a visible exodus near the border. The wealthy residents who owned property close to the volatile zone, where clashes between government forces and intruders sporadically erupted, began to abandon their homes. Their quick departure signaled a decisive loss of faith in the area's security. Simultaneously, the movement was mirrored by a steady stream of visitors who were urgently packing up to abandon the entire region. This widespread flight was driven by the grim official confirmation that their own foreign governments had issued urgent warnings advising immediate withdrawal. The area was rapidly turning desolate, becoming a zone reserved only for conflict and the military response.

The Undeniable Reality of Conflict

Despite the management's assuring words and the carefully controlled narrative, the reality of the ongoing border clashes was an overwhelming force that the media exposure could not conceal. That reality still created a deep torment, etching the chilling thought of bloody war into the minds of the young men. This psychological collapse was audible: from the avenues of the nearby quarters, the desperate, pleading cries for help of

some men could be distinctly heard, while the weakest among us were gripped with paralyzing terror.

Faced with this inescapable mental siege, we were left with no alternative. We understood that to survive this period, we had no choice but to keep moving and constantly keep ourselves occupied. This was a deliberate, desperate strategy—a way to exhaust ourselves and distract our minds enough to forget about the pervasive syndrome of anxiety that threatened to consume us entirely.

Deployment to the Suites

At the jobsite, the pre-existing tension was immediately channeled into work. Everyone had been swiftly dispatched to their respective, high-security assignments within the conference center complex. Mike, our supervisor, wasted no time, issuing curt, rapid-fire instructions to his subordinates before moving directly toward Neil and me.

His tone was all business, reflecting the urgency of the moment. "Neil, you will be assigned to suite twenty-three," he commanded, his eyes then settling on me. "Paul, you will be assigned to suite twenty-six, temporarily, as room steward." He then clarified the necessity of my dual role: "But you will also perform the duties of an electrician since there is not much dedicated wiring work for that job right now." My assignment was clear: I was expected to manage the suite's luxurious environment while remaining on call for technical issues—a critical and sensitive role within the high-stakes environment.

I could offer no answer that acknowledged the pressure of the dual role, only immediate, unquestioning obedience. "I agree, as commanded," I replied, the words clipped and formal.

Mike's expression hardened, moving past the assignment to issue a direct, chilling threat. "I am warning you," he stated with absolute finality, his eyes holding mine. "Don't attempt to detach any small or big fixtures anywhere inside this room. This is high-security property. If you do, you will be dealt with harshly—either immediately dismissed and blacklisted, or sent directly to jail." The threat was a stark reminder of our expendability in this opulent, secure environment.

Taking the warning to heart, Neil and I immediately began our tasks. We worked with forced enthusiasm, pouring energy into scrubbing and arranging the luxurious suites. We were trying to sweat it out—the physical exertion was a deliberate exercise to alleviate the chilling, ever-present effect of the cold weather outside, and more importantly, the icy grip of fear and anxiety inside our minds.

The Relentless Demand for Perfection

Charles was a constant, scrutinizing presence. He relentlessly roamed around the jobsite, his inspection a serious, high-pressure tour meant to ensure absolute compliance. As was entirely expected, he was exceptionally vocal about what needed to be improved, his voice cutting sharply through the work noise. He incessantly kept reiterating the critical need to perfect the job, demanding that every task be completed precisely in the way he desired, allowing for no variation or personal interpretation.

This great insistence on achieving the desired, flawless result had a dual and intense effect on us. On one hand, his relentless drive for excellence moved us to recognize the high stakes of the summit preparation. On the other, it placed immense and immediate pressure on us, transforming every small task into a critical performance. Consequently, we were entirely driven to

achieve the job with fervent urgency and absolute perfection every single time he issued an order.

The brief moments of reprieve were precious. The only time we felt truly at ease was when Charles left our area and headed to the conference center to monitor its larger development. In his absence, a different kind of work began: we had the space to learn his patterns, clearly understand what we should be doing, and, critically, master how we should behave in his presence.

The rules were unwritten but absolute: if one did not make things easy for him, that individual would be dealt with harshly and accordingly in his characteristic manner of tough, calculated bullying. I remember well the clear, unspoken hierarchy of the jobsite. There were established "places" reserved for the tough guys who were reigning—dominating and oppressing—the weak. Charles was simply the highest authority in a system built on dominance and fear.

The Corrupting Influence and Internal Conflict

In effect, Charles wanted his subordinates to emulate his domineering character, viewing his arrogance as a necessary trait for control. The immediate, destructive consequence was that many of these subordinates became arrogant and conceited themselves, adopting his bullying mannerisms. This profound behavioral change within the lower management hierarchy quickly led to a host of new troubles cropping up across the jobsite.

The internal tension eventually boiled over into violence. There was even a brutal fistfight in a hidden nook—a secret battleground where goon-like individuals attempted to establish dominance by challenging the existing "tough guys." Disturbingly, this oppressive dynamic was not confined to inter-ethnic conflict; the violence also erupted between fellow countrymen who belonged to the same ethnic race, particularly

among the Asians, proving that the desire for power and control trumped loyalty, and Charles's toxic example had corrupted the entire environment.

Christmas Under the Cold Shadow

The **most awaited Christmas season** had finally descended, yet it arrived with a chilling solemnity that defied typical holiday cheer. Christians were granted the rare **privilege of celebrating the holidays**, a small concession even though Kuwait remained a strictly **Muslim state**. However, this observance was severely limited: reduced to mere **merry-making** and the indulgence of **abundant food**, devoid of the public rituals and displays common elsewhere.

Adding to the stark atmosphere was the **unyielding cold weather** that relentlessly gripped the region, persisting its bitter hold until February. While **snowfall in the city was a very rare, almost mythic occurrence**, the true chill came from the north. During the winter months, **strong and arctic cold winds** began their furious descent, **bombarding the region** after sweeping down from the upper, exposed portions of **Iraq and Iran**. This powerful, persistent gale made the already stark climate **immeasurably colder**, turning the festive season into a period of deep, penetrating physical discomfort.

The Frozen Grip of the North

The arctic severity of the weather was most pronounced near the Kuwait-Iraq border, where occasional snow showers could even be experienced in northern parts of Iraq, such as Baghdad. Since our arrival, the cold had been a great, relentless, frozen experience, a constant physical burden that traveled with us every time we moved along the highways to the jobsite.

The true challenge was the wind. When the tempestuous, strong, cold winds struck, they were a force of nature, making it nearly impossible to walk normally. The chilling blast was so intense that it would rattle the body to its core—we could hardly walk straight as our knees shook uncontrollably against the brutal, physical onslaught of the northern gale.

Christmas and the Lifeline of Letters

My Christmas experience was a stark and emotionally resonant departure from home, rendered profoundly different by the isolation of the foreign land. Our only true consolation—the sole tether to a life of warmth and normalcy—came in the form of precious letters from our loved ones.

The absence of this connection was a heavy burden. If a couple of weeks passed with no mail, I would be driven back to the past, compulsively retrieving and reading the previous letters all over again. I would pore over each line and paragraph with a desperate scrutiny, each word dearly meaning everything to me—a fragile bulwark against the mounting loneliness.

The postal system offered little comfort during this emotional crisis. Letters were notoriously slow, arriving long after their intended date. According to the post office, this chronic delay meant most mail would be received mostly after the Christmas season, a brutal consequence of the sheer bulk of holiday mail that had to be tediously sorted. The wait only magnified the ache of absence.

A Christmas of Strangers

The traditional Filipino Christmas was a vibrant and cherished experience, defined by warmth, noise, and abundance: family gatherings were central, accompanied by the joyous rituals of gift-giving, communal merriment, generous eating, and endless drinking.

In this cold, foreign land, however, that tradition was impossible to uphold. We were all forced into a difficult compromise, having to be intensely patient and flexible as we celebrated the most important holiday of the year amongst strangers. The spirit of the season was replaced by a grim necessity, exchanging the comfort of family for the stiff company of colleagues in a state of high alert.

The scent and the spirit of the season, despite being muted in the foreign land, acted as a cruel trigger. The faint, familiar atmosphere only intensified our feelings, making us acutely homesick and filling us with an overpowering eagerness to be back home.

The weight of the isolation was palpable. I finally voiced the collective sorrow, the words emerging softly. "This is the saddest part of the season here, isn't it?" I asked, the question less about information and more about shared misery.

Neil's reply carried a defensive, weary resilience. "Not really," he said, pausing slightly. "It so happened that we have not emotionally adjusted yet." It was an acknowledgment of their psychological fragility, admitting that the current sadness was a failure of adaptation, not an anomaly of the season.

Neil, sensing the descent into emotional gloom, offered a practical path toward relief. "Why don't we go out and join others at the bonfire bash?" he suggested, the idea a lifeline out of isolation.

"Where are they?" I asked, eager for direction but still weighted by inertia.

"They're gone there," he replied simply, already turning toward the door.

The destination was a scene of necessary, forced camaraderie. The bash was bountiful, a rare, large gathering where everyone could join the crowd of various ethnic groups. We readily looked forward to the opportunity—not just to meet friends, but to try and make new ones.

Life here was a relentless psychological burden. It was hard to live in this world of strangers where you profoundly felt you didn't belong, but the truth was far worse: it was harder to live in an environment where your true enemy was your fellow men, the very people who were always a constant, destructive threat to pull you down. The bonfire, therefore, wasn't just a celebration; it was a temporary, guarded truce in the daily war for survival.

A break in the monotonous tension arrived unexpectedly. "**Hi, Neil, would you like to go with us?**" an **Indian friend**, whose face was animated by anticipation, asked Neil.

"**Where to?**" Neil replied, his curiosity immediately piqued by the sudden invitation.

"We will attend the **Christmas party at the Marriott Hotel**," the friend explained, his voice conveying excitement. "There are **plenty of our fellow men and other employees there**—it's a massive gathering." The promise of a large, convivial gathering was instantly appealing after the isolation of the camp.

"**Right now?**" Neil asked, surprised by the immediacy.

"**Yes!** And you can **bring your friends there**, too," the Indian friend confirmed, urging us along.

Neil then executed the crucial social gesture, turning to me. "**By the way, Bulah, meet my friend and roommate, Paul,**" he introduced, gesturing between us.

The Indian friend, whose name was apparently **Bulah**, offered a quick, friendly welcome. "**Hi, Paul, nice to meet you. Won't you join us?**" he asked directly.

The opportunity to escape the camp's oppressive atmosphere and join a large, celebratory group was irresistible. "**Yes, sure,**" I agreed instantly, a sudden sense of relief replacing the earlier tension.

Escaping to the Marriott

We wasted no time. Immediately, we escaped the monotonous atmosphere of the camp party and hurried outside, driven by the lure of freedom and festivity. We quickly hailed a taxi, and the three of us sped away, heading directly toward the legendary Marriott Hotel.

As we approached, the hotel appeared as a dazzling beacon in the otherwise stark city. The place was stunningly and colorfully illuminated by glaring, luxurious lights, a stark, vibrant contrast to the utilitarian gloom of our camp. The entrance was a flurry of activity, with a constant tide of visitors coming in and out.

Bulah led us discreetly. We bypassed the main lobby and entered through the back door of the hotel, where the real celebration was already in full swing. The room hosting the party was alive with energy. We were instantly enveloped in warmth, meeting a great number of our fellow countrymen and friends. The sensory overload was immediate: the tables were a lavish display, offering a tantalizing variety of many different food menus, signaling a temporary but total break from the fear and austerity of the jobsite.

Feast and Fear

We attacked the buffet with the hunger of men long deprived. Our stomachs were stretched out as we kept taking in plate after plate of the succulent, mouth-watering, and rarely-tasted food. It was an ecstatic indulgence, a stark contrast to the utilitarian meals at the camp.

The surprise escalated when they began to serve wine. Alcohol was a forbidden luxury, and the sight of it created an immediate, tense internal debate. As much as we would have liked to have done shots and truly let go, we instinctively abstained, fearing that we might be apprehended by the hotel's ever-present security or management. The threat of jail was too fresh in our minds.

Bulah, sensing our hesitation, became the immediate voice of temptation. "No problem, take a shot!" he urged, leaning in with confidence. "Nobody will apprehend you in the hotel. They know better here." His insistence challenged our deeply ingrained fear, forcing us to choose between security and celebration.

"Really?" I repeated, a thrill of rebellion overcoming my fear. Taking a deep breath, I made the decision: "Okay, I will take a shot." The small act felt huge, a symbolic break from the rigid rules of the camp.

Neil, though still cautious, followed suit. "Just a little one, for me," he said, accepting the drink and downing it quickly.

The atmosphere around us was already intoxicating. The room was alive with movement—girls were all around, dancing and eating, their laughter a bright, welcome sound.

Bulah, seizing the moment, called over two young women. "Mina, Lorie, meet my friends, Paul and Neil," he announced, making the introductions with enthusiasm.

"Nice meeting you girls," I said, offering my hand as we shook theirs.

The girls were quick to make the connection. "We are from Manila," Mina said, assessing us with a smile. "No doubt, you two are from the Philippines, too."

"Obvious, right?" Neil replied, the shared nationality instantly creating a relaxed bond.

Bulah then seized the moment for posterity. "Okay, friends, let's take a souvenir photo," he insisted, pulling out a camera to capture the fleeting sense of joy and escape.

As the party continued, the connections deepened. Neil immediately befriended Lorie and drew her into a lively, sustained conversation. Meanwhile, I found myself inexplicably reluctant to befriend Mina, a very pretty young lady who, we learned, worked directly in the Marriott Hotel. The reason was unclear, but I kept my distance while my friend easily forged a new connection.

Intimacy began to thaw my earlier reluctance, leading us into a **privy, hushed conversation**. Seeking a quieter space and a change of scenery, I offered a casual suggestion: "**Let us see the beauty of the garden lit up out there,**" gesturing toward the illuminated exterior.

Mina smiled knowingly. "**I am pretty sure this is your first time here,**" she observed.

"**Exactly. We're from Camp Reggae,**" I confirmed, admitting our origins.

"**I know, from Bulah,**" she said simply.

"How did you know Bulah?" I asked, curious about the connection that had brought me this unexpected night of freedom.

"My Indian co-employee is his friend," she explained, confirming the network of workers that crisscrossed the city.

I turned the conversation to her life, wanting to understand the permanence of her stay versus our fleeting contract. **"How long have you been at this hotel?"**

"Two years now. Renewable yearly," she replied, before adding a piece of knowledge she'd gathered: **"I understand that your stay here is only for three months."**

"Yes, until the duration of the summit," I confirmed, the reality of our temporary status returning. I couldn't help but ask the question that constantly weighed on me: **"Do you know about the current situation? Are you not scared?"**

Mina's response was immediate and starkly practical, cutting through the anxiety. **"Yes, I do,"** she confirmed, referring to the crisis. **"And I am no longer afraid of whatever happens because I am used to it. I must earn a living, you know. Life back home is miserable."** Her resilience was forged in necessity.

I then asked the question that often defined a man's presence there: **"Are you a family man?"**

"Yes, and my wife is pregnant," I revealed, the fact adding a layer of risk and urgency to my three-month contract.

I hesitated, then reluctantly turned the question back to her: **"How about you?"**

Her voice softened slightly. **"I am a single mom. My five-year-old son is with my mom,"** she confided, explaining her own powerful motivation for enduring the job.

"I see. I understand you," I replied, the shared burden of obligation instantly creating a powerful, silent bond between us.

Suddenly, our brief, pleasant intimacy was **interrupted**. **"Paul, c'mon, it's late in the evening! We have to get back home now,"** Neil called out, his voice signaling the abrupt end of our escape.

I turned back to Mina, the moment of farewell heavy with unsaid things. **"I hope to be seeing you again,"** I whispered, the urgency of my desire genuine.

"I hope so," she replied, her face shadowed by the dim light, leaving the possibility of a future connection entirely up to chance and the looming political situation.

The sudden end to the party meant we were thrust back into the cold reality of the city. It took us a frustrating amount of time to wait for a taxi, so we decided to take a chance and walk to the opposite side of the road, hoping to find better luck there.

While walking, our relief was abruptly shattered when we came across two roving Kuwaiti policemen. They emerged from the darkness, their presence instantly tightening the air.

I reacted quickly, using the formal Arabic greeting to show respect: **"Salamalaikum,"** I offered.

"Malaikum salam, how are you?" the first officer replied, his voice calm but his Arabic accent unmistakable, keeping the exchange formal.

The second officer, however, got straight to the point, his tone marked by suspicion. "What are you here for in this hour of the night?" he demanded.

Neil, attempting to be instantly transparent, explained our situation. "We're going back to Camp Reggae. We just had our party at the Marriott Hotel," he said.

The first officer processed the information, the tension easing slightly. "Oh, I see, you are hotel workers for the Islamic Conference?" he asked.

"Exactly," I replied, confirming the status that served as our only official protection in the late-night streets.

The Marked Handshake

"Did you enjoy the party?" the second police officer asked, a slight smile replacing his earlier suspicion.

"Sure. There are lots of nice people here. By the way, Merry Christmas," I responded, embracing the small, unexpected moment of shared humanity.

"Merry Christmas to you all, also. It's your occasion," the first officer replied warmly. He then did something entirely unexpected: he smiled and extended his hand for a friendly shake with each of us, signaling the end of the questioning. "Goodnight, gentlemen," he said.

"Goodnight to you, too," we replied, relieved as they walked away into the darkness.

But the relief was immediately replaced by a sudden, creeping unease. As I lowered my hand, I instantly noticed that a sticky substance was on my palm. I glanced at Neil, and saw he had the exact same dark stain. We quickly walked toward a nearby lighting post to examine the residue. Under the weak glow, the

truth became clear: our palms were stained with ink. Our first, nervous thought was that a pen must have simply leaked from the officer's hand during the shake, but the coincidence felt cold and unsettling. The friendly farewell had, in reality, been an act of marking.

Here is a detailed and serious rewrite of the arrival back at the camp and the scheduling change.

Late Return and Delayed Start

It was well into the deep hours of the night when we finally arrived back at Camp Reggae, the earlier exhilaration of the party now replaced by the cold reality of the military-guarded compound.

The following morning, however, brought a small, unexpected reprieve: we were officially allowed to report late to the jobsite. Management understood that the brief, unauthorized celebration had consumed our rest time. It was an implicit acknowledgment that we had to get enough rest to be fully functional before we were expected to start working again on the high-pressure, sensitive tasks within the conference center.

The Pervasive Threats and Rumors of War

The atmosphere was thick with dread as rumors and explicit threats of invasion became viral, seeping out of the borders of the state and rapidly contaminating the consciousness of the entire world. Likewise, the daily media cycle was dominated by the terrifying crisis in the Gulf. This was no localized skirmish; its impact was immediate and global, as the economies of many nations were visibly affected by the sudden, critical inadequate supply of oil originating from this volatile part of the world. The crisis was a tangible chokehold, proving that the conflict in the desert had worldwide ramifications.

We made a conscious, daily effort to learn to live with this pervasive anxiety, accepting it as the toxic atmosphere of our existence. But we also had to become profoundly strong—a necessity whenever a new, unpleasant situation flared up. A desperate, concealed struggle raged deep inside each of us, a constant mental battle we needed to win to simply remain strong enough to survive the contract. The pressure was immense, yet we worked tirelessly to mask it. The only manifestations of this internal torment were subtle: a flicker of fear in our facial gestures, a slight tremor in a hand, or, at times, a single, weary utterance that betrayed the sheer weight of the constant dread.

The Nightly Torment

At night, when the camp was dark and silent, my mind offered no peace. It was tormented by the dark side of my thoughts, constantly citing a terrifying reel of possible events that might shatter our dreams. The pervasive paranoia haunted our collective minds, revolving around the tangible threat of a possible bloody enemy attack.

The scenarios were graphic and terrifying. Such an attack would certainly shatter the conference center, the nearby hotels, and our own camp. If we were unlucky enough to be caught in the crossfire, we knew death could come in multiple, violent forms: we could have died instantly by gunshots, or been crushed by the falling debris of the shattered buildings. Alternatively, we faced the grim prospect of sustaining heavy, life-altering injuries as the direct result of the expected fiasco of the summit meeting. Every night became a cold, relentless rehearsal of catastrophe.

The nightmares continued to spiral: if we were not killed outright, the grim prospect remained that we would be held captive, forced to suffer the agony and consequences of simply

being present in this contested area. Yet, one truth remained paramount: we had to live. That singular necessity was the reason we were forced to remain emotionally strong, finding reserves we didn't know we possessed.

In the face of every potential disaster, I determined that I had to fight whatever happened. I spoke the resolve to myself, an internal declaration of war against fear: "Be a man enough to face all the consequences of this responsibility, for the state, and for my family. Die a hero! If it's your time, then so be it!"

With this desperate delusion of heroism, I felt like I was enduring a horrendous nightmare even while awake, constantly struggling to survive from being engulfed by paranoia. A relentless, strong force of negativism seemed intent on pulling me down, making me feel as if I were being dragged toward a state of complete insanity. The fight was no longer just against an external enemy, but against the breakdown of my own mind.

In other words, the psychological attack was total: I was suffering from severe, paralyzing **paranoia**. Unable to lie still any longer, I abruptly **sat upright** in bed, the sudden shift in posture mirroring my desperation. Driven by instinct, I **suddenly rushed to the kitchen** to grab a glass of water—a deliberate, physical act intended to snap the tether of my racing thoughts.

I drank slowly, letting the cold water ground me. **Slowly, I was refreshed and restored to reality**, the physical sensation counteracting the mind's fictional horrors. The emotional fight had left me entirely spent. My **exhausted body leaned flat in the bed**, finally surrendering to the crushing weight of physical fatigue. With the immediate crisis averted and my mind temporarily subdued, **I finally got the rest that I desperately needed**, collapsing into the void of sleep.

Chapter 6

The Long Nightmare

Even though my exhaustion had forced me into sleep, the relief was short-lived; my rest was troubled by a nightmarish slumber that offered little true escape.

The nightmare bled into reality with an unwelcome voice. "This is just an invitation, Paul, so that our friendship will go deeper than being my subordinate," Mike insisted, his tone attempting a false sense of intimacy. "Anyway, your accommodation is just a few steps away," he added, downplaying the risk of his true purpose.

The invitation was an obvious risk, and I tried to deflect him with an honest, safety-conscious refusal. "It's difficult to join you because I am not a gambler," I replied. I then stressed the high-stakes danger: "The fact that gambling is strictly prohibited here will put us in serious danger of being penalized if we're caught." I understood that his casual offer was a trap, and acceptance would instantly make me vulnerable to his authority.

Mike dismissed my fears with chilling confidence. "Don't worry, nobody will dare to squeal, nor will they betray us," he asserted, his voice dropping slightly. His reason was a veiled threat: "because everyone in my neighborhood is a member." It wasn't a social club; it was a pact of silence enforced by proximity.

"What if I firmly refuse?" I asked, pushing back, trying to assert my autonomy.

He modulated his tone, shifting from casual invitation to subtle coercion. "I am not forcing you to be a member," he said smoothly, before applying the real pressure. "But no one among our fellow men has ever refused this deal because it offers protection from our enemy." He framed the illegal gambling operation as a necessary defense mechanism against the camp's ethnic hostility.

He then presented the details as trivial: "It is just a matter of a dinar membership fee and a bond. You will be able to play and win as much as you desire." He concluded with a fake assurance of control: "However, you can withdraw your fee if you don't want to pursue it anymore." The entire pitch was a meticulously constructed trap, thinly disguised as an act of camaraderie and security.

"No, thank you. I don't want to gamble, nor would I have any interest in becoming a member," I replied, making my refusal firm and final. I knew the words carried a massive risk, but I could not yield.

In that moment, I did not know the specific consequences my refusal would bring to me; I only knew that challenging a supervisor in a volatile environment was dangerous. What I did know with absolute clarity was that he had no right to coerce me to accept what was against my will, especially when his proposal was an obvious crime against the strict law of the state. My refusal was less about morality and more about self-preservation, refusing to put my future and freedom in jeopardy for a few dinars and a supervisor's ill-advised "protection."

The Arena of Indifference

As I was compelled to observe and describe the environment, it became chillingly clear where the camp's true danger lay. The place was inhabited by different people with profoundly conflicting values, yet paradoxically, this conflict did not lead to

political engagement but to an atmosphere of political indifference. Everyone seemed concerned only with their own survival, ignoring the common good.

The camp functioned less as a community and more as a brutal social experiment. It was exactly like an arena, a constant, unforgiving battleground where the rules were simple and cruel: the weak were, without exception, the losers, destined for hardship, while the tough reigned supreme, dominating the resources and the social hierarchy through intimidation. This environment fostered a dangerous culture where compassion was a liability, and dominance was the only true

Overwhelmed by the Job

In the face of the immediate, crushing demands of the conference preparations, the specter of invasion was, remarkably, set aside from the thoughts of everyone. This wasn't a choice; it was a consequence of exhaustion. Our minds were utterly occupied by the hectic, relentless schedule of the job. The sheer volume of work became a psychological defense mechanism.

Though we were exhausted from the day's labor—our bodies aching and strained—we found absolutely no time to appreciate the thought of invasion. The dire, suspenseful threat of war had been superseded by the immediate, biological need for survival. The only appealing option was sleeping, a deep, necessary oblivion used to re-energize for the new day's tasks immediately after filling our perpetually hungry stomachs. The threat of death was deferred by the sheer necessity of work and rest.

The tranquility of the place was a profound, welcome sensation—a genuine appreciation for a good night's sleep that had been long denied. In the still of the night, while my roommates dozed off, I suddenly opened my eyes, snapped

awake by an instinct that somebody out there was approaching the door.

My gaze immediately went upward. Below the slight, open edge of the door, the unmistakable shadow of a man was projected by the hall lights onto the ceiling of our room. He stopped, standing facing the door for a moment, then slowly turned right and walked away. The figure's measured, unhurried steps convinced me that he was merely a roving security personnel assigned to our quarters.

With this simple confirmation, a wave of relief washed over me. I felt securely confident that no one or nothing else—no jealous coworker, no violent rioter—would interrupt me or threaten our rest. Thus assured, I finally closed my eyes, giving in completely to the deep, healing sleep I needed.

The Early Morning Raid

The morning's tranquility was violently shattered. While we were all still deeply asleep, pounding, insistent knocks on the door echoed through the room, jolting us awake and prompting us to rise with a panicked, instinctive speed. Since I was closest, I quickly moved and opened the door.

Standing framed in the doorway, their expressions stern and unforgiving, were an Arab head of security and two other uniformed men. The sight of them was terrifying, but what they held was worse: one of them displayed a smut magazine—illegal contraband—and another clutched a bottle of concocted wine. The clear, damning evidence was that my name was prominently written on the wrapper of the illegal alcohol. The friendly handshake from the night before was now undeniably clear: I had been marked and set up.

Confrontation and Denial

The head of security's voice was sharp and formal, cutting through the silence of the room. "Artus Augustino?" he demanded, intentionally mispronouncing my name but clearly identifying his target. "We would like to invite you to the office of Mr. John Peterson for interrogation regarding this smut magazine and bottle of concocted wine." He delivered the "invitation" with the cold authority of a summons.

I was completely surprised, the shock freezing the blood in my veins. I instantly, vehemently denied ownership of those filthy things. The entire situation was a carefully constructed frame.

The officer ignored my protest, his expression hardening as he moved to intimidation. "Don't you know the strict rules in this state, what you must observe and avoid?"

"But those are not mine!" I insisted, my voice rising in a frantic defense. "I don't know anything about them!" I repeated, utterly bewildered but fully aware that my frantic denial sounded weak against the sight of the contraband with my name on it.

Under Arrest and Neil's Vow

"Apparently, your name is on the wrapper. Just come to the office to explain further," the head guard replied dismissively, cutting off any further defense. For him, the evidence was conclusive, and my protests were irrelevant.

I felt an immediate, sickening combination of nervousness and bafflement. The reality of the frame-up hit me hard: How could this issue have happened to me? The fear of the state's legal system, already heightened by the recent riot, crushed my resolve. Knowing that refusing was not an option, I had no choice but to go with them and accept that I would not be reporting for work—my job security instantly vanished.

As the guards prepared to escort me, Neil stepped forward, his expression full of genuine concern. "Don't worry, Paul, I will testify for you!" he asserted, the promise a lifeline in my despair. "I know that the smut magazine and the bottle of wine are not yours. I will go with you," he declared, offering his sympathy and his presence as a crucial witness, refusing to let me face the powerful security forces alone.

Here is a detailed and serious rewrite of the men's immediate reaction and their attempt to identify the culprit.

Willy stepped forward, his face etched with concern, quickly offering the most plausible explanation. "Perhaps someone has framed you up," he stated, his voice tight. "We're on your side, Paul. You won't be penalized for this." His reassurance, though heartfelt, felt thin against the cold reality of the guards.

Adam was more analytical, seeking the motive behind the setup. "I believe that someone has a grudge against you," he said, looking at me intently. "Did you offend somebody here?"

The question triggered a sudden, sickening realization. The grief over my situation instantly mixed with a surge of hot anger. "I have a strong feeling that this is Mike's evil way of revenge for your declining his proposal," I declared, referring to my refusal to join his illegal gambling operation. The evidence was circumstantial, but the timing was too perfect. "He will answer for these things!" I vowed, the words a raw release of despair and fury.

Before I was led away, Adam made his commitment absolute, meeting my gaze with determination. He simply said that he would stand by my side, ensuring I would not lack for a witness or support in the coming interrogation.

"No, you have to go to work," I insisted to Neil, stopping him from sacrificing his job. **"Your absence might be questioned."**

I can manage, anyway.” I knew I had to face the situation alone to protect my friends.

A wave of crushing certainty hit me: **I would be in grave trouble this time.** The sheer danger of the situation was compounded by the fact that **Arabs were the ones who discovered those filthy things** and had carried out the arrest. I knew that, to their credit, **J. Peterson and the Arabs** would conduct a formal investigation.

After mechanically eating a minimal breakfast, I proceeded directly to Peterson’s office. I did not have to **wait long for the investigation or hearing committee** to assemble. In fact, I was immediately **surprised** when I found that **they were already there**, ready and waiting for me—like an **early riser** waiting to start a difficult day. The setup was designed to intimidate: **John Peterson**, acting as the powerful **chairman of the five-member committee/panel**, would personally conduct the hearing. The atmosphere was formal, hostile, and utterly serious.

The Weight of Legal Authority

As I faced the panel, I quickly learned crucial information that lent an overwhelming sense of gravity to the proceedings. One of the men seated there was Atty. Mahmoud Malik, a confirmed Sharjah lawyer. Even more significant, John Peterson, himself, had studied law before diverting his career path into the hotel business.

There was, therefore, absolutely no doubt that they possessed a deep understanding of the procedural and substantive laws that should govern the hearing. This fact, surprisingly, offered a faint glimmer of hope: I believed that because of their legal expertise, there would be no immediate miscarriage of justice—they would adhere to a fair process, even if the deck was stacked against me.

The entire process of examination was strikingly impressive, resembling a formal legal inquiry. It was conducted with such rigor and structure that it was similar to a court proceeding, a level of formality that was intimidating, especially since this was my very first time appearing in any kind of investigation involving an alleged offense.

The Cross-Examination Commences

My immediate impression of the setup was, surprisingly, one of guarded respect. It seemed the authority here was genuinely practicing justice for the protection of civil rights and was operating in careful defense of the prevailing Islamic laws. They were following a strict process before an accused person would be deemed an offender and delivered to the harsher local police custody if found guilty. This formality, though terrifying, offered a faint hope of fairness.

The cross-examination commenced instantly.

The first member to speak, a stern investigator in a police uniform, went straight to the heart of the matter, his tone leaving no room for equivocation. "Mr. Paul Augustino, is this smut magazine, and concocted bottle of wine, yours?" he asked, gesturing to the evidence on the table.

My denial had to be absolute and immediate, regardless of the consequences. "No, Sir," I replied.

Pressured by the Evidence

The investigator pressed the attack, leveraging the physical evidence against my denial. "How come you deny these matters when your name is obviously written, in bold letters, on the paper wrapped on it?" he demanded, his voice challenging the very truth of my statement. He then offered three possible

routes of guilt: "Did somebody give this to you, or are you a subscriber to this smut magazine, and concocted wine?"

I fought to maintain my composure, my defense an appeal to my established character. "I do not know why someone would give them to me," I countered, rejecting the first option. "Nor am I a subscriber to that magazine, nor am I a maker of wine." I reached for the ultimate proof of my innocence: "Even back home, I was never indulged in such things," I insisted, trying to use my history as a shield against the manufactured evidence.

The second investigator, taking a different line of attack, moved the focus from the evidence to the severity of the law. "Did you know that the Islamic law is so strict with these kinds of filthy things, and that they are definitely prohibited?" he asked, his voice a calculated reminder that conviction meant severe punishment in this state.

I understood the weight of his question. My defense had to emphasize my awareness and compliance. "Yes, Sir, I know; that's why I have abstained from these things," I replied, trying to sound as sincere as possible. "I am completely aware of the strict Islamic rules." I was implicitly arguing that someone fully conscious of the legal risks would not carelessly have his name written on illegal contraband.

Peterson's Final Interrogation

John Peterson, taking control of the hearing as chairman, leaned forward and drove the examination toward the possibility of betrayal. "Do you know of somebody inside the camp who is concocting wines and reading smut magazines?" he demanded, giving me the clear opportunity to name a culprit and explain the source of the contraband.

He then immediately pivoted to the critical legal question, putting the entire burden of my defense onto my shoulders: "Give me some reasons why you should not be punished for possessing this smut magazine, Mr. Paul Augustino." It was the decisive moment—a command to defend myself against the evidence with the truth, or suffer the legal consequences in a state known for its harsh enforcement of Islamic law.

The Final Plea

"None, Sir," I replied, acknowledging that I had no witness or specific name to offer. I shifted my focus entirely to my commitment to the law and my family, making my defense an appeal to logic and self-preservation. "I know that by violating the Islamic rules, I will be dealt with strictly by the law and suffer the consequences based on the offense I committed."

I leveraged that knowledge as my ultimate proof of innocence. "The fact that I know about the prohibition and its consequences, however, would never allow me to bring in illegal drugs, engage in gambling, or read smut magazines. Also, I would not drink intoxicating beverages that might endanger myself here."

My voice gained a desperate conviction as I made my final, personal plea. "I am a family man, Sir. I cannot sacrifice my sanity, the fate of my wife, and that of my unborn child for this kind of foolish offense." My final argument was that the risk far outweighed the meager gain, making the crime completely illogical for a man with so much to lose.

Here is a detailed and serious continuation of the cross-examination, focusing on the character's appeal to faith and the calculated naming of a system of bullies.

I pressed my case further, appealing not just to logic but to my moral core. "Aside, I believe and fear God. I am a man of

values. What could I profit from doing such a filthy thing when I know that it is strictly prohibited here? Would I ruin myself?" I challenged, making my alleged guilt seem utterly senseless. "You can check my character with my previous references." I concluded with the central accusation: "I firmly believe that I was framed up by someone who has a feeling of resentment against me."

The investigator seized on the claim. "Do you have any enemies in your quarters, or in this camp, as a whole?" he asked directly, forcing me to name names or acknowledge the danger.

I chose my words carefully, unwilling to outright accuse Mike without proof, but eager to point toward the oppressive environment he represented. "I have not known an enemy here," I replied, then immediately added the critical distinction: "but there might be some bullies who are always happy bullying ordinary men like me." It was an indictment of the camp's toxic culture, pointing the finger at the type of person who would execute such a calculated frame-up.

Peterson's Revelation and the Suspects

As I spoke, I watched John Peterson's face light up with recognition, and for the first time since my arrest, I felt he was convinced by my defense. My words had clearly struck a nerve, likely reminding him of past incidents.

I knew the camp had a history of internal crime. I recalled a specific prior event when unscrupulous men, often working with accomplices from a different ethnic group, had been caught concocting intoxicating beverages and gambling—the very offenses I was now accused of. Those men were initially suspended, but, in a chilling demonstration of expediency over justice, were eventually set free for the sake of their service to the state and the needs of the summit.

My mind immediately jumped to them. I was thinking that they could easily be the ones who had a hand in my current trouble, even though I had never known them personally. The powerful coincidence was simply that my refusal to join Mike's scheme made me a perfect, vulnerable target for anyone with a history of crime and resentment who needed to settle a score or deflect suspicion.

Absolution and Final Warning

John Peterson finally brought the intense hearing to an end. "All right, your reasoning is qualified," he stated, confirming that my desperate, logic-based defense had convinced the panel. "We will absolve you this time." The weight of the immediate threat was lifted, but the relief was immediately tempered by a stern command: "But you have to take extra care with the unscrupulous elements around you."

He then provided me with an unexpected but crucial directive. "Should you discover someone trying to bully others, and you, don't hesitate to report it to us." His tone was now resolute, focusing on protecting the organization's integrity. "We will not tolerate this kind of behavior in this organization, or our contract with the management could be severed anytime." The clear message was that while I was free, I was now expected to act as an informant against the very toxic culture that had attempted to destroy me.

Charles's Late Arrival and Final Verdict

Before the serious committee meeting was officially adjourned, Charles arrived, walking into the office just as the final procedural steps were being taken. He was immediately informed by the committee about the entire explosive incident, including the evidence, the accusation, and my successful defense.

The relief was made official: the committee members proceeded to sign my resolution, formally documenting the findings of the investigation. The document certified that I was acquitted of the penalty. However, the resolution came with a severe, non-negotiable codicil: a clear, written warning that if I were ever caught doing such things in the future, the penalty would be absolute—I would be instantly sanctioned for a week, without salary, signaling that my reputation, though salvaged, remained under intense scrutiny.

Here is a detailed and tense rewrite of the head guard's cross-examination.

The Cross-Examination of the Head Guard

Immediately following my acquittal, the committee's focus snapped to the man who had brought the charges. They began the cross-examination of the head guard, Officer Al Fahkih, the man who had formally exhibited the illegal smut magazine and the bottle of wine.

J. Peterson, acting as the chief inquisitor, leaned forward. "Officer Al Fahkih, how, and when, did you get hold of the smut magazine and the bottle of wine?" he demanded, the question forcing the officer to detail his version of the discovery.

Al Fahkih stood firm, offering a precise, practiced timeline designed to sound credible. "Sir, at exactly four-thirty this morning, during my routine inspection of the quarters," he stated. He paused for dramatic effect before delivering the key piece of evidence: "I found the smut magazine and the bottle of wine at the foot of their door. I immediately picked it up and saw Paul's name printed in bold letters around the wrapper," he replied, pointing an accusatory finger toward me as he confirmed the intentional frame-up.

The Officer's Account

The questioning continued, seeking to poke holes in the officer's version of events. "Did you notice somebody along your way when you stepped into the hallway of their quarters?" one panelist asked, trying to establish if the officer had witnessed the culprit who had placed the items.

"No, Sir. I did not see anyone," Al Fahkih replied, maintaining that the hallway was deserted, which subtly suggested the items had been placed there earlier.

J. Peterson then took over, focusing on the officer's procedure. "What did you do next?" he continued.

"I went back to the office to record the details of my findings," the officer stated, insisting on his adherence to bureaucratic protocol.

Peterson immediately challenged the delay, striking at the credibility of his actions. "Why did you not immediately tell Paul Augustino about what you found?" The question implicitly suggested a suspicious lack of urgency or an attempt to delay alerting the victim.

The Justification of Procedure

Officer Al Fahkih offered a rigid, procedural justification for his actions. "I did not because it was too early to disturb their rest, and it is our standard operating procedure to hold in custody for examination, or verification, anything we find as principal, or accessory things in the commission of the crime until we summon the suspect." His reply implied that he was following strict protocol, making his delayed confrontation seem appropriate rather than suspicious.

The panelist then shifted to the regularity of the security operation, testing the consistency of his patrol claims. "How

often do you conduct your routine inspection in the camp?" The question sought to establish whether the timing of the discovery was a common occurrence or an unusual, perhaps staged, coincidence.

Patrol Schedule and Past Incidents

Officer Al Fahkih confirmed the rigid structure of the security operation. "It is our policy that my subordinates and I are deployed to all quarters for routine inspection, beginning at one o'clock in the morning, and lasting until five o'clock in the morning." The window for the frame-up was now chillingly defined, encompassing the time of my alleged rest.

The panelist then moved to the history of contraband. "Is this the first time you found this nasty magazine and wine in this camp?"

Al Fahkih clarified the context, implicitly drawing a line between the current hotel recruits and the previous occupants. "My first time, Sir, since the hotel recruits arrived at the camp." He then provided crucial background that supported my earlier suspicion of a frame-up by existing resentments. "But, before I came here, there was already the same incident, whereupon the culprits were caught and suspended, but they were forgiven because their service was badly needed." He concluded by confirming their identity as external contractors: "They did not belong to the hotel, but to a different company. They had been transferred out of the camp." The officer's testimony confirmed that the camp harbored a history of lawbreakers who were allowed to escape punishment, giving credence to my theory that a disgruntled former resident or their accomplice was now retaliating.

"We know that. All right, thank you, Officer Al Fahkih," the panelist concluded, cutting off the officer's testimony.

"You're welcome, Sir," the guard replied as he was dismissed.

The panel then took a few minutes' recess—a brief, tense pause—while they meticulously studied the case one final time, weighing the physical evidence against my logical defense and the officer's testimony regarding the camp's history.

Shortly after, John Peterson reconvened the hearing and made his formal, definitive pronouncement:

"Based on the context of the defense, we found his testimony meritorious," he declared, the legal term confirming my innocence was accepted as truth. "This is because some unknown, unscrupulous elements might have maliciously perpetrated the offense. We concluded that the strength of his argument rendered the object of offense to be unmeritorious—it lacked true weight." Peterson then defined the clear motive of the culprits: "Their objective was clearly to downgrade, morally ruin, embarrass, and penalize for no reason at all the person accused." The committee was not merely acquitting me; they were condemning the calculated, malicious nature of the frame-up.

Final Judgment and Exoneration

"And, therefore, we pronounce the accused to be innocent of the charge. This meeting is adjourned."

With those decisive words, the nightmare was officially over. The final verdict, a testament to the brief but intense legal proceeding, was immediately formalized:

(Signed), John Peterson (Chairman) Attested by Atty. Malik (Panelist) and Officer Al Fahkih (Investigator)

A wave of profound, overwhelming relief washed over me. After the intense psychological torment and the credible threat of prison, I was genuinely delighted by the judgment rendered

by the committee. I was not merely dismissed; I was officially exonerated, protected from the malicious frame-up that had threatened to destroy my life and my family's future. The legal process, intimidating as it was, had served its purpose.

Charles's Scrutiny and the Return

Charles approached me the moment the acquittal was finalized and immediately asked me to sign the documents. His demeanor was not sympathetic; it was demanding and accusatory. "How come there is an incident like this in your area?" he asked, making it sound as though the mere existence of the crime was my responsibility.

"I don't know," I replied, maintaining a firm but respectful tone. "But I believe that there are some unscrupulous elements out there trying to screw me and push me against the wall." My statement was a direct accusation against the camp's toxic internal hierarchy.

Immediately afterward, both he and the head guard—now oddly allied—escorted me on my way back to the quarters to officially check the area where the contraband was found.

As we walked, Charles continued his interrogation. "Who do you think did this to you? Do you suspect anyone who has personal resentment toward you?" He was forcing me to name a culprit, making it clear that while I was acquitted, my security would only be guaranteed if I helped eliminate the threat.

"I cannot be sure at the moment, but in due time the perpetrators will surface," I replied, choosing to withhold my suspicion of Mike until I had solid proof, aware that a false accusation would only worsen my standing.

Charles, understanding the potential for retaliation, immediately issued a severe warning. "I am telling you to avoid

revenge and physical contact with anyone whom you suspect of having done this to you, or you may also suffer future consequences," he commanded. His concern was not for my safety, but for order.

He then reiterated the threat to the company's contract. "Try to check on this because we cannot tolerate this kind of thing happening, or others will suffer the same," he added. The pressure was now reversed: I was exonerated, but I was also tasked with policing the very unscrupulous elements that had tried to destroy me. The price of my freedom was continued vigilance.

Anger and Caution in the Mess Hall

In the **mess hall that evening**, the atmosphere at our table was one of palpable relief. My roommates were genuinely **so glad to hear that I was acquitted in the case**, treating the verdict as a minor victory over the camp's oppressive forces.

But my own relief was colored by a burning resentment. I spoke the name that was on everyone's mind. "**I have no doubt that Mike is the instigator of all this**," I declared, the word dripping with hostility.

Neil immediately tried to temper my rage with a dose of realism. "**Probably**," he conceded, his voice low. "**But, be careful, he's got some bad guys behind him**." It was a crucial caution, a reminder that Mike was a small part of a larger, violent system.

I dismissed the warning, fueled by the conviction of my own innocence. "**I don't care about them**. I am not afraid," I insisted, my jaw tight. "**As long as I'm on the right track, justice will prevail**." It was a defiant, necessary claim of moral authority in an environment where true justice was rare.

The Path to Liability

"Keep calm. Take it easy, relax," Neil urged, his voice filled with concern. "Give him a chance. Otherwise, you will be in trouble again." He was pleading for restraint, knowing that any act of personal vendetta would be seen as a violation of my acquittal.

"I know, I know," I replied, acknowledging the necessity of caution. "I don't want trouble to hinder my job. Anyway, I have been acquitted." My focus was now purely tactical. "The only objective now is to prove, and make Mike liable for the offense that he has committed"—to shift the burden of guilt entirely onto the true culprit using the system that had just exonerated me.

I took a moment to reflect on my initial refusal. "It's good that he was frustrated when asking me to join his selfish scheme," I told Neil, recognizing that my refusal had made me an enemy, but had also kept me legally clean.

Neil offered a final, profound piece of luck that had kept him safe. "It so happened that we have not crossed paths," he said, grateful that he hadn't been targeted by Mike's malicious scheme. The night's conversation ended with a shared understanding that while I had escaped, the fight for true justice had just begun.

"The best thing you can do now is to be civil and calm, so we can set a trap for him," Neil advised, his tone shifting from friend to strategist. "Don't tell him that he's the instigator, or you'll instantly be in deep trouble. Although, we know it just as well as he does," he added, a glimmer of cleverness in his eyes.

"You have to be clever, and you'll be able to trap him in due time."

“You’re right,” I conceded, realizing the immediate power of my exoneration. “The burden of proof now is upon him to prove his innocence if I decide to turn this around. I will put the words in his mouth.” The strategy was clear: maintain a facade of ignorance while subtly maneuvering Mike into a verbal admission of guilt.

Clandestine Meeting Behind the Bushes

Meanwhile, somewhere in the backyard, behind the thick, shady bushes, two men were engaged in a low, conspiratorial conversation.

“Did you make it into the database?” Hassan asked, the urgency in his voice suggesting high-stakes risk.

“Yes, I have included all the names as part of the hotel’s bona fide workers,” the other man replied. This confirmed a serious act of fraud: the illegal insertion of unauthorized personnel into the official roster.

“Are the laminated IDs well-done?” Hassan pressed, concerned with the quality of the forged identification.

“Excellent,” the man named Hassan confirmed, implying they had passed a high standard of inspection.

The man then added, with a chilling lack of remorse, “I sacrificed some names”—a veiled reference to using legitimate workers as cover or eliminating potential informants.

The core motivation was revealed with the final, blunt question. “By the way, where’s the money?” the man asked. The entire operation was clearly a highly profitable, illegal scheme exploiting the summit’s high-security needs.

“Later,” Hassan stated dismissively, using the high-stakes risk as leverage. “The summit is not yet over. That’s the contract,

right?" He was stalling the payment, citing the ongoing work and the peril they were under.

"But, I need even half of it, as promised," the other man pressed, his voice taut with urgency and financial need, unwilling to wait for the completion of the entire illegal operation.

Hassan quickly resolved the issue, not out of generosity, but to end the risky public discussion. "Okay, tomorrow evening, come see me at my room," he said. The location was a discreet promise: the partial payment would be made, but only under the cover of darkness and within the absolute security of his private quarters.

Chapter 7

The Close Encounter of the Threat

At the jobsite, everyone was a frenzy of activity in all corners of the center and the hotel suites. The pressure was intense, but I was suddenly given a crucial warning: Neil, who was working three suites away from me, discreetly signaled that Mike was approaching.

Mike arrived moments later, wearing a smug look on his face that was impossible to misinterpret. "How are you, Paul?" he asked, his tone radiating false concern. "I learned that you were in trouble the other day. What's it all about?" He was clearly feigning ignorance of the frame-up he had orchestrated, hoping to enjoy my distress.

I immediately looked straight into his eyes. I had rehearsed this moment. My expression was one of intense, severe focus, yet I was emotionally controlled. I forcefully held my temper against the powerful, internal urge to outburst and expose his malice, knowing that my restraint was the key to setting the trap.

"Ah, yes, but it was settled right away," I replied, my voice carrying a distinct note of displeasure, letting him know I was far from grateful for his inquiry. "How did you know about it?" I pressed, feigning curiosity while demanding a source.

"A friend of mine learned it from the office," he said vaguely, offering a standard, non-committal answer intended to protect his network.

I seized the opportunity to inject pure, controlled hostility into the conversation. "You've got too many ears and eyes, haven't you?" I asked, the question heavily laced with sarcasm, making it clear I knew his 'concern' was merely surveillance.

He was obviously uncomfortable with my sharp, sarcastic statement. His facial expression changed critically, the smugness instantly replaced by defensive annoyance.

"What's the problem with having too many friends?" he asked, attempting to regain control of the conversation by sounding offended.

I didn't let up. My counter-attack was delivered with a calculated, disarming smile, allowing me to deliver a brutal truth while appearing calm. "Nothing, but you have been so friendly and unique, as you have gotten too many enemies, too, when you stepped on the toes of others," I replied. I was deliberately linking his aggressive sociability to his malicious actions. I ended with a final, cutting observation: "You're like a chameleon that changes colors," I added, directly accusing him of being deceptive and untrustworthy.

Mike's feigned composure finally broke. "Do you want to imply something? You are abusively annoying me!" he snapped, his voice rising in anger. The accusation was exactly what I wanted.

"Why do you feel something is wrong?" I asked softly, forcing him to internalize his own guilt.

He tried to turn my tactic back on me, his voice incredulous and defensive. "Are you trying to insinuate that I know something about your case because I have too many friends here?"

I hit back with surgical precision, discarding the pretense of politeness. "The issue here is not your friends, but you, alone," I frankly stated. I then delivered the final, crushing blows, a relentless assault on his conscience: "Why? Are you not comfortable? Do you feel guilty? I am not saying, nor insinuating, anything, but your restive tongue is betraying you." I made it clear that I had not accused him—his own panicked self-defense was doing the job for me.

Mike completely lost control. His face contorted with rage, and he was mad. He glared at me with a clenched fist, a clear, physical threat, and then pointed a finger directly at me.

I seized his furious reaction as one final opportunity to insult and wound him. "Your appearance speaks of what you are because you have plenty of gangster-like friends," I shot back, intentionally lashing out at his inflated self-image and his network of thugs.

He quickly regained just enough composure to issue a chilling promise. "You do your job. We're not yet through. We'll settle this personally, between you and me, outside," he threatened as he wheeled around and walked away, leaving the air thick with unresolved violence.

The Warning

Neil immediately approached me, his eyes wide, asking anxiously, "What happened?"

I quickly relayed the whole conversation, detailing the psychological war and Mike's final, violent promise.

Neil's face tightened with concern. "Be careful, Paul. He's a bad guy and has plenty of followers," he warned. The acquittal had only escalated the danger; I had won the battle in the office, but the physical confrontation was now inevitable.

"I know. But I have to be fearless and face the consequences of this personal crisis," I insisted, rejecting the safety of avoidance. The necessity of a confrontation felt like a burden I had to shed. "It would be better to **put an end to this** than let the grudge hang on forever. Whatever happens, I will **defend my personal rights**," I declared, the statement a vow of self-defense.

"Don't worry, we will be on your side, whatever happens," Neil promised, his words a solid foundation of support.

I accepted his solidarity, then voiced my ultimate confidence in dealing with Mike. **"I have nothing to fear, for we have the same color and origin.** I know how to deal with this kind of mammal," I added, using the contemptuous term to dehumanize Mike and assert my superior understanding of his character and tactics. The conflict was no longer a legal matter but a primal struggle for respect.

High Noon Provisions

At twelve o'clock, high noon, the daily ritual of lunchtime began. Our packed lunch, shared from the camp, arrived promptly, delivered by the Bangladeshi kitchen staff to our respective, hurried assignments across the jobsite.

We generally appreciated the food, which was cooked variedly with different menus, often featuring welcome servings of chicken and beef. These meals were a vital source of energy and a small comfort in the stressful environment. However, there were times when we were not satisfied—specifically when the menu recycled the same core ingredients, merely cooked with slightly different spices and a variety of herbs. While we were grateful for the provision, the monotony was a palpable disappointment in an otherwise demanding routine.

The Push to Finish and the Cold Wait

During the afternoon, a new sense of urgency drove us, and we typically **tended to become more productive**, pushing hard to meet our quotas. This momentum usually peaked just as our **relievers for the evening shift would arrive**, signifying the imminent end of our workday.

The transition from the sterile workplace to the freedom of the outdoors was ritualistic. We **normally queued at the electronic door to clean up** and check out before we could finally and **freely see the boundless fields of sand out there**.

However, the workday often extended far past our official shift. There were times when we were forced to wait,

standing around for both the **service bus and our relievers until deep into the evening**. During these delays, we would congregate just **outside the main gate, on the rocky and sandy area**, trying to create warmth. We stood there, **resisting the cold-blowing wind with our sweaters**, the air quickly dropping temperature as the sun vanished, marking a sharp contrast between the controlled interior of the center and the harsh, unforgiving Kuwaiti desert night.

The Insult in the Cold

The cold wait outside the gate created an immediate divide: it was **fortunate for those who had always brought their sweaters tied around their waists**, but **unfortunate for those who had forgotten them**. For the sweater-less, the only **option was to compress ourselves together**, huddling tightly to share body heat and **keep us warm**.

While we grouped ourselves for survival, we couldn't help but notice a nearby **group of fellow men chatting** who were pointedly **looking at us**. We immediately **ignored them** and consciously took **no time to provoke and spark an argument**, prioritizing peace over pride.

Despite our efforts to keep the distance, our avoidance was met with intentional malice. To our **dismay, we clearly heard someone among the group uttering an insulting statement**. We were certain it was **being directed at us**, a blatant attempt to **expressly provoke us to retaliate**. But we held our tempers. Instead of falling into their trap, **we did not retaliate; we simply stepped**

away to avoid an unnecessary incident, retreating further into the sandy darkness to wait for the bus.

Final Insult at the Terminal

Later, **two separate buses arrived** to fetch us. We consciously **boarded separate buses**, a silent agreement to diffuse the mounting tension and **avoid immediate friction** with the hostile group. The ride back to the camp was quiet, but the conflict was merely delayed.

However, the moment we reached the **bus terminal of the camp**, the confrontation reignited. One of the men from the hostile group immediately **provoked us again** as we disembarked, singling me out and uttering a final, venomous **insulting word at me**.

It was a final test of our resolve. While the rest of the weary workers, including the insulters, **all proceeded directly to the mess hall for dinner**, we refused to give the situation more energy. **Neil and I** simply turned our backs on the conflict and **proceeded to the mini-mart** instead, prioritizing a necessary errand over a futile, dangerous fight.

Confrontation in the Dark

As we walked away, we heard their voices behind us. **Mike and the man who had been insulting us** called out, standing menacingly **behind the bus**. Against every instinct, we paused and **followed them to the dark side of the camp**, a secluded area where the confrontation could take place without witnesses.

"What's your problem?" I demanded, cutting straight to the core of the hostility.

Mike's response was cold and immediate. **"Nothing personal, Paul, but I tell you, we're not finished.** Let's settle this issue. **It's you and me, right now,"** he said, making the challenge explicitly physical.

"Then, what do you want?" I asked, playing for time, and subtly alerted Neil to the severity of the confrontation with a quick glance.

Mike clarified the rules of his illegal duel, attempting to guarantee impunity. **"It's between me and you. No one else will intervene.** This will not come to the knowledge of the concerned authorities." He was assuring a brutal fight, far from any official oversight.

The Duel in the Dark

He definitely wanted to sweat it out in a fistfight. The location had been chosen for maximum impunity: the site was solitary and isolated, perfectly covered by the dark shade of trees so that no one would be able to see us. It was precisely the kind of unregulated fight Mike wanted.

Without preamble, he released his first blow, a desperate strike that I was ready for and was able to avoid with a quick shift of my body.

My retaliation was immediate and precise. I countered with my left punch, connecting cleanly, and he was hit hard in the right cheek. The force was enough to disrupt his balance; his left foot did not support his weight, and he stumbled and fell to the hard, uneven ground.

I did not press the attack. I deliberately did not continue to strike, instead waiting for him to stand firm and return to his feet. Dazed by the blow, he looked momentarily confused, as if he was dozing and wanted to snooze right there in the dirt. My punch had stripped him of his arrogance, leaving him stunned and vulnerable.

The Threat and The Escape

His friend instantly rushed to his side and **helped him to his feet**. Seeing him wobbly but back up, we had no desire to prolong the inevitable consequences. **We quickly left the scene** of the fight, retreating from the darkness.

As we walked away, Mike's voice—now ragged with defeat and fury—followed us. "**We're not finished yet, Paul. You will pay for this!**" he threatened.

My final reply was dismissive and calm, designed to further humiliate him. "**You'd better stop your foolishness and go to sleep,**" I said.

We then made our way to the **mess hall and finally took our dinner**, the fight over, but the adrenaline still surging.

The Unsettling Sight

Along the way, however, we were alerted to a new, unsettling sight. We **spotted Hassan**—the man discussing the fraudulent IDs—and a **company employee** talking intently with a **familiar Arab man from the administration office**. They were deep in conversation, and we made sure **they did not see us, as we avoided them** by crossing to the other side of the path.

Their proximity and meeting location instantly made us **curious about the movement of those people**. Their presence was anomalous: we **seldom saw them on the jobsite** because their specialized assignment—conducting training with other hotel workers—was scheduled to **commence only two days before the summit conference**. Their premature, secret meeting with an administration official strongly suggested their fraudulent operation was moving into its final, dangerous phase.

The Segregated Perimeter

At the camp, the movements of this particular group were highly restricted and noticeable. We would only see them in the mess hall when they took their meals, always clustering along with their fellow men. This insularity was enforced by the camp layout itself: their quarters were physically fenced meters apart from all other ethnic groups, creating a zone of intentional segregation.

Entry into this compound was strictly regulated. Only those who had legitimate business transactions, friends, or relatives were permitted to enter their perimeter.

The landscape surrounding their isolation provided a crucial, silent cover for illicit activities. The outskirts, however, were covered and heavily shaded by grown bushes and trees, providing a natural screen. This thick foliage ensured that no one could be seen when sneaking into or out of the premises, making it a perfect, clandestine location for illegal meetings and operations, a fact that deeply unsettled us given our recent observations.

Inconclusive Surveillance

One evening, immediately after taking our dinner, Neil and I implemented our plan. We hung around the corner of the mess hall, maintaining a casual air while waiting for Hassan and his party to emerge. Once they did, we cautiously began to track them down under the cover of darkness.

We followed their path directly to the grown bushes that bordered their secluded quarters. Sneaking closer, we found a discreet vantage point and peeked from a half-opened glass window that allowed us to see inside.

The view, however, was frustratingly anticlimactic. We saw nothing incriminating, only a collection of electronic gadgets, small transistor radios, and a mess of electrical wires, all of which looked suspiciously broken. We reasoned they might be fixing something, or perhaps the items were just junk.

We took a few minutes of waiting, tense and silent, to see what could possibly transpire. But the longer we waited, the more pointless the exercise felt. Thinking we would gain nothing from this senseless stalking, we finally decided to leave the premises and made a conscious effort to forget about them, determined not to let paranoia distract us from our work.

The Midnight Exchange

Coincidentally, while we were trying to forget our suspicions, we were entirely **unaware of the significant**

transaction transpiring in an isolated area of the camp while everyone else was sound asleep.

Taking advantage of the predictable security lapses, and in the temporary **absence of security personnel** (whom we assumed were patrolling somewhere else in the vicinity), **Hassan and his friend, Ahmed, briskly walked by the side and stepped out of the main gate.**

The rendezvous was executed with chilling speed. **Two men in a waiting car met them, quickly gave them a bag, and immediately drove away from the site.**

Hassan and Ahmed wasted no time. Capitalizing on the continued **absence of the security personnel at the gate**, they bypassed the main entrance. Instead, they cut back into the camp through the dense, shady growth—the very **thick and shady bushes** we had seen covering their perimeter. With the illicit package secured, they **quickly made it back to their accommodation, completely unnoticed**, their successful operation signaling a major escalation in the camp's undercurrent of criminal activity.

The Attack in the Suite

In the wake of our fight and my subsequent acquittal, Mike had not moved on; the issue was, as I suspected, not really closed. The final confrontation came not on the dusty outskirts of the camp, but in the close, confining space of my own temporary sanctuary.

Inside the bedroom of the suite, he and his friend entered and shut the door with a chilling finality. Mike approached me, his eyes burning with renewed fury.

“Paul, now it’s our turn. Nobody is going to squeal to the authority, just you and I,” he challenged, trying to sound like a man of honor, even as he was preparing an ambush.

“What is it that you want?” I asked, the surprise in my voice quickly giving way to alarm.

“Let’s see who the real man is,” he sneered. Then, with a sudden, vicious speed, he lunged and collared me, his hands gripping the front of my shirt, pulling me into a desperate, confined struggle.

I reacted instantly. I **grabbed his collaring hand and used his own momentum to push him** hard at his friend; they both stumbled backward and **fell in a heap on the edge of the bed**.

Since I was determined to **avoid trouble**—and the inevitable consequences of a serious injury—I had **no choice but to defend myself from their unlawful aggression**. While they were down, I delivered a calculated response: I **kicked both of them, with precise force, in their buttocks**, carefully aiming to **avoid bleeding from the tips of my shoes** and escalating the violence. I then stepped back, giving them a chance to recover.

I was **determined to overcome them** through strategic strength. I allowed them a chance to **stand and resume the fistfight**, confident in my physical superiority. **I had a muscular, athletic-type body** and stood a dominating **eight inches higher than they**. Both of them were short, standing only about **five feet four inches tall**, and burdened with **fat bellies like real drunkards**. The fight

was not a fair match, and I knew my strength and condition would quickly end their ambush.

Charles's Intervention

While the desperate **struggle continued during a closed-door session**, locked away from witnesses, we had no idea that **Charles had been roaming around** the hallway, specifically looking for someone in our suite. He knocked, then, hearing nothing, **called the staff in the adjacent suites** and urgently asked them to open the door to my room.

Moments later, the fighting ceased, and **we went out**, stepping into the hallway. We were **obviously exhausted**, showing clear signs of the brawl, with **sustained facial bruises and reddened cheeks**.

"What's happening here?" Charles demanded, his voice sharp with authority and disbelief at the sight of three bruised, dishevelled workers.

At first, **nobody answered**. We simply **kept calm as we fixed ourselves**, adjusting our clothing and wiping the sweat and dirt from our faces, trying to minimize the appearance of a fight.

Finally, Mike offered a denial. **"Nothing, Sir,"** he mumbled.

"No. Something happened here. I know because of your appearance!" Charles shot back, his gaze cutting between us. He then shifted the focus to their dereliction of duty, using the job as leverage. **"Did you know that you're supposed to be working right now?"** The

question was a clear reprimand. **"All right, you'd better fix yourselves and report to the office, right now!"** The command was absolute: the fight was over, and the consequences would be dealt with formally.

Facing the Second Hearing

With this new **trouble now facing me**, an immediate wave of anxiety washed over me. I could only **hope and pray that I would be acquitted, just like before**. The circumstances, however, were far more damning this time.

Undeniably, the offense was perpetrated on the jobsite, an act of violence that Charles had witnessed and would now certainly testify to. The **apparent physical evidence**, the **bruises and reddened cheeks sustained in the duel**, spoke for themselves. This was **apparently a serious offense committed during working hours**, a direct violation of company and state rules that threatened our entire contract.

Despite the fear, my faith in the process remained. **Again, I knew that due process must be observed to justify any possible penalties for the offenders**. This procedure was my only defense against immediate dismissal.

The formality of the hearing only increased the tension: **the same panel, again headed by J. Peterson**, would conduct the administrative proceedings. I was stepping back into the exact same arena, but this time, the evidence against me was my own bruised face.

The Second Interrogation

The tension in the administrative office was immediate and suffocating. J. Peterson began the proceedings with a direct demand for my account. "Will you narrate to us how it all started, Mr. Paul Augustino?"

I gave a precise, factual timeline of the attack. "Yesterday, at approximately 10:30 in the morning, I was inside the bedroom of suite 26, where I was assigned to clean and polish the room. I was surprised when Mike and his friend, Whitey, suddenly entered the room and confronted me."

"Then, what did those two do to you?" Peterson pressed.

"Because of our previous dispute, he confronted me, again, to vindicate his defeat and unacceptable humiliation during one of our encounters elsewhere in the camp. He challenged me and provoked me into a fistfight," I stated, carefully characterizing the violence as an act of retaliation and provocation, not mutual combat.

Establishing the Proximate Cause

John Peterson then ceded the floor to the legal counsel, Atty. Malik, who immediately sought to establish the history of the conflict.

"You mean to say that there was already a prior dispute between the two of you, the proximate cause preceding your confrontation now?" Atty. Malik asked, using the legal terminology to frame my defense.

"Yes, sir," I answered, confirming the history of malice.

"Will you elaborate to us on how this dispute caused this confrontation?" he added, opening the door for me to

reveal Mike's pattern of antagonism, from the frame-up to the physical attack.

I paused for a moment, carefully organizing the order of events that I should narrate to the panel. My silence was strategic, building anticipation. Then, with courage and without doubt, I began to divulge the dangerous secrets which might acquit me.

"To tell you the truth, the root cause of his sentiment is my refusal to join as one of the members of his gambling party," I stated directly. "Joining would have required me to pay a membership fee or a bond of three dinars. In return, it would provide protection and support against anybody who would put me in trouble, and act as an assurance that I can play a game of chance at any time."

I was immediately interrupted. The panelist who asked the next question was clearly shocked. "You mean to say that there is a gambling activity going on in this camp? How come?"

"Yes, sir. It is conducted in his room, in his very accommodation," I replied, confirming the precise location of the illegal activity.

"Can you prove that?" he continued, his tone turning skeptical.

"I cannot show it to you now," I admitted, explaining the nature of the operation. "It is secretly conducted during nighttime, as scheduled, and only when the members are available to play."

The panelist pressed hard on the lack of immediate evidence. "That is a blatant lie if you cannot prove your allegations. Thereby, you are falsely accusing him," he said, putting the severe weight of a false accusation on my shoulders.

"I am not lying, Sir," I countered firmly. "There is no chance to prove it now that the subject knows of this revelation and would prevent him, and his friends, from doing it to evade detection."

At that time, the floor was given back to Atty. Malik. "But what proof can you show us to accuse this man named Mike of gambling and being the cause of your dispute?" he demanded. My survival now depended on linking my refusal to join his crime with the subsequent attacks.

The Core Defense

"By my personal testimony, I will submit my proof," I declared, my voice vigorous and unwavering. I delivered the final, critical piece of my defense. "I was previously accused of possessing a smut magazine and wine, which I successfully contradicted. That would erase the cloud of suspicion and conclusively prove that he was the instigator in snaring me for the smut magazine and the wine," I pronounced, pointing the finger of guilt directly at Mike.

John Peterson was visibly surprised by the direct accusation of a setup. "Do you mean to say that he was the direct principal in the perpetration of the crime of setting up a smut magazine and a concocted bottle of wine that

was accused of you before?" he asked, seeking absolute clarity on the gravity of the charge.

"Precisely, Sir," I replied.

Mike's Cross-Examination

The floor was immediately given to Mike for his cross-examination, and the tone shifted instantly from inquiry to indictment.

"Mr. Michael Pecayo, you are a group supervisor, correct?" John Peterson began, using Mike's title to establish his responsibility. "Did you know that you are just one of a hundred supervisors in this project?" The question was a subtle way of reminding Mike that he was disposable and not above scrutiny.

"Yes, Sir," Mike answered.

"How did you become involved in all this? As a supervisor, do you know the ethical standards and conduct that a supervisor should possess and observe in these premises?" Peterson continued, laying the groundwork for a charge of ethical misconduct and criminal conspiracy.

"Yes, Sir," Mike mumbled in response, his earlier confidence completely gone.

"But, how did it happen to you?" Peterson pressed, cutting through Mike's earlier answers. "You're being accused of **initiating a duel**, and of the severe issue of **framing up Paul with a smut magazine and a bottle of wine**. Can you explain it to us, please?"

Mike immediately attempted to sanitize the conflict, crafting a scenario of workplace grievance. “The incident at the jobsite was just a **mere misunderstanding** and a **petty issue that pertains to job-related functions**,” he claimed. He then played the authority card. “It’s all because he **refuses to cooperate with my instructions, as his superior**, which caused me to lose patience.”

“What were your instructions that he refused to obey?” J. Peterson asked, forcing Mike to detail the supposed insubordination.

Mike quickly invented a task log. “I told him to prioritize cleaning the **reception room of the suite because the carpet looked untidy**. And, after that, I said he should proceed to the dining room to wipe and sweep out the littered dirt before fixing the bedroom fixtures,” he continued, spinning a meticulous, plausible lie.

I was **astonished by the blatant lie** that Mike had the nerve to assert. His attempt to cover his criminal actions with a false record of insubordination was an **incredible conception of events that never happened**. The depth of his deceit was shocking.

Mike's Denial and Counter-Attack

Mike continued his confident stream of lies, directly addressing the core criminal charges. “About his accusation that I masterminded the setting up of a smut magazine, and a bottle of wine, at the foot of his door is unfounded,” he asserted. “And I am not compelling him to be a member of what he alleged as a gambling party in my room. There is no proof he can show that there is

gambling activity going on in my room,” he concluded, relying entirely on the lack of immediate, physical evidence against him.

Atty. Malik then stepped in, aiming to uncover Mike's motive for lying. “Mr. Mike Pecayo, why do you think Mr. Paul Augustino is accusing you of these charges?” he asked.

Mike launched his counter-attack, attempting to psychologically discredit me. “Perhaps he has become bitter because I am his supervisor, since he did not want to submit to my authority, and it resulted in unavoidable physical contact.” He then layered on a cruel, personal smear: “He could be confused and depressed because of his personal problems, and, apparently, he is homesick,” Mike lied, attempting to paint me as an unstable, emotional victim whose testimony should be dismissed.

The Supervisor's Conduct

John Peterson seized on Mike's claim of authority, using it to dismantle his defense. “As the supervisor, you are expected to be **mature, broad-minded, and have self-control**, especially when dealing with difficult subordinates. **Why did you not avoid physical contact beforehand, but let it happen instead?**” He implied that Mike's failure to de-escalate was a supervisory flaw.

Mike quickly crafted a narrative of necessary self-defense. “Because he was already provoked by our argument. I noticed that he **clenched his fist, posing to strike me** as I moved swiftly; that's why **I was able to repel him from assaulting me**. Otherwise, I would have been hurt.” He

completely reversed the situation, portraying himself as the victim reacting to my aggression.

Identifying the Accomplice

Atty. Malik intervened, focusing on the presence of the third person in the room. **“Mr. Pecayo, who is the man behind you?”** he asked.

Mike identified him, maintaining his lie about official business. “He is my friend, **Dan**, a subordinate whom I asked to go with me in supervising my area of jurisdiction,” Mike replied. He was attempting to justify having an accomplice present for what was clearly an illegal ambush.

Here is a detailed and tense rewrite of the continuation of Mike's cross-examination, focusing on the panel's sharp questioning about his accomplice.

“Why did you have him go with you when it is your sole duty to supervise? Was he not supposed to be in his place of assignment during working hours?” **Atty. Malik** questioned, his voice rising slightly as he worked to catch Mike in a clear lie about the escort.

“Yes, Sir, but I needed him to go with me only for that day, to train, and to see, for himself, how those experienced ones are doing well their assigned tasks,” Mike claimed, attempting to weave his accomplice into the fabric of legitimate work.

“Did he also fight Mr. Augustino for you? Obviously, he sustained contusions in his left eye,” **Atty. Malik**

continued, pointing directly to the visible evidence of Dan's participation.

Mike quickly backpedaled on his accomplice's role. "He tried to **stop us**, but, unfortunately, he was **hit by Paul's fist**," Mike replied, casting his friend as an innocent, injured peacemaker rather than an active participant in the ambush.

The Panel Confers

The legal maneuvering abruptly stopped. The panelists **interrupted the cross-examination for a few tense minutes and huddled together**, their voices lowered to inaudible whispers.

John Peterson and Atty. Malik, along with the rest of the panelists, conferred on the complexities of the escalating case. The core issue was the sharp contradiction before them: my claim—that I was framed with contraband and then ambushed after refusing to join a **gambling party**—was met by Mike's **firm denial** of all charges, bolstered by his fabricated story of workplace insubordination. They were weighing a **baseless accusation** (my word against his) against **unfounded denials**, struggling to penetrate the web of deceit to find the truth and assign liability for the physical assault.

Adjournment and Mandate

Atty. Malik broke the strained silence, acknowledging the panel's difficulty in reaching a decision. "While this issue has become **complicated**, we need enough time to

profoundly study and examine the **surrounding circumstances involved in this case.**"

He then delivered the formal decision. "Therefore, we have decided to **adjourn this hearing today and resume it the day after tomorrow.**"

The immediate return to work was mandated, serving as a tense ceasefire. "Meanwhile, the parties involved in this case **may resume reporting to their jobsite,**" he declared, ensuring productivity resumed. "But you are all **required to return on the day after tomorrow, for the finale of this hearing.**"

He concluded the grueling session with a terse dismissal. "**Thank you,**" Atty. Malik said, signaling the end of the proceeding and leaving the fate of both parties hanging in painful suspense for two more days.

Sleepless Nights and Internal Resolve

The predicament I was experiencing, indeed, **tormented me so much** that it caused me a **sleepless night and crippling anxiety.** Everyone in the camp was already wrestling with the usual burdens—being **homesick, anxious, and desperate for love letters from home.** But for me, this situation amplified that despair tenfold.

The thought of being falsely condemned under these foreign, strict laws was a constant weight. Yet, despite the fear, I knew the stakes were too high to break. **I had no choice but to be strong** and face the resumed hearing head-on, because deep down, I knew **the truth was mine.**

My survival depended entirely on my ability to hold firm against Mike's web of plausible lies.

The Decisive Search and Discovery

The following day, with the hearing still adjourned, the administrative panel made a crucial, high-stakes move. As everybody was working at the **jobsite**, **Officer Al Fahkih and his men** were unanimously ordered to conduct a **house search** of both my quarters and **Mike's quarters**, where he lived alone.

The search team's initial amazement quickly turned to confirmation. In my quarters, they found **nothing in my possession that would serve as evidence of guilt**. I was clean.

The reversal of fortune was immediate and complete in Mike's room. Beneath the mattress of his bed, the officers **evidently found copies of the smut magazines**. Even more damningly, they located **packs of gambling cards** stashed under a cabinet. The panel had acted on my unproven claims, and the physical evidence now **conclusively exposed Mike's network of lies** and the true nature of his criminal enterprise within the camp.

The Post-Search Realization

During that night, after the shock of the daytime search had subsided, I noticed something small but significant: some of my pocketbooks were placed on top of my table, a spot I never left them. I habitually kept them underneath my pillows after reading.

A sudden wave of caution made me turn to my friend. "Did anyone enter here?" I asked Neil, with some hesitation.

"I didn't think so, why?" he replied, genuinely confused, while Adam and Willy looked on.

"Would it be possible that those in authority entered our room to search?" I asked, seeking confirmation of my suspicion.

Willy, being the practical one, confirmed the security rules. "Yes. The security staff and hotel authorities have control of the master key, and they can conduct a legitimate search upon lawful order of the management, in circumstances requiring them," he opined.

"I kept my pocketbooks beneath, but I found it here," I said, pointing to the books, the simple displacement serving as undeniable proof of the intrusion.

Neil immediately connected the dots. "No wonder, they're conducting a house search to find material evidence in your case against Mike," he said, realizing the panel had acted on my claims.

"You're conclusive, Neil, but you're definite," Adam stated, acknowledging the accuracy of the theory.

I finally breathed a sigh of relief. "Anyway, it's okay, they found nothing," I stated, understanding that the search, while unsettling, had ultimately worked in my favor.

Mike's Frantic Discovery

In his growing dismay and anxiety, Mike returned to his room and began to frantically search all around the corners of his quarters for the now-missing objects that served as the material

evidence of his crime. His previous arrogance had vanished, replaced by genuine depression as he fully grasped the reality of the house search conducted in his room.

Desperate for an explanation, he rushed out and knocked on the door of his neighbor.

"Somebody entered my room. Who do you think did it?" he asked, his voice strained.

"I don't know. Everyone was at the jobsite," the man replied, confirming Mike's worst fear: the intruder had been an insider.

"What's missing?" the neighbor asked.

"My gambling cards and my magazines," Mike replied, his voice laced with fright. He retreated, his mind racing, and went back to his room.

He slumped onto his bed, the truth hitting him with devastating force. "They came here and searched. They got it," he said to himself, realizing the administrative panel had launched a counter-offensive and now held the definitive proof of his guilt.

The Verdict Approaches

The tense day finally came for the resumption of our hearing. The administrative panel, having acted on my unproven claims, was ready to reveal the consequences of their investigation.

Atty. Malik opened the proceedings, immediately and expressly confirming their warrantless search conducted in our quarters. The legality was questionable, but as I knew, the truth came out.

"We just conducted a house search in your respective quarters to produce and ascertain the legality of both parties' allegations," Atty. Malik stated, justifying the intrusion. "It is

management's prerogative to look into the veracity for the resolution of this case, as we found no choice but to obtain material evidence by breaking into your privacy without malice, so that justice may serve its purpose."

Before he could continue with the findings, Mike's complaint cut him off. The supervisor was clearly panicked and desperate.

"But, Sir, that's an **invasion of privacy**," **Mike complained**, his voice now a desperate plea against the administrative power. "The security personnel have just **violated the law by warrantless search**, and my personal right," he finished, attempting to use legal formality to shield his guilt.

Atty. Malik cut him off with a powerful, authoritative rebuttal that dismissed the legal technicality in favor of expediency and truth. "You may know the law, but for every rule, there is an **exception**," he stated. "Some **shortcomings may be right, to serve the good means**, and some rights may be wrong. Otherwise, wrong may always be wrong," Atty. Malik explained, effectively declaring that their illegal search was justified by the resulting truth.

Defeated and exposed, **Mike kept silent**. The battle over procedure was over, and the outcome of the hearing was now a certainty. The floor was then officially ceded to **John Peterson** for the final, damning judgment.

Final Judgment and Exoneration

J. Peterson took the floor, his authority absolute. "As expressly explained, things worked out for the greater good," he stated, accepting the questionable legal means used to find the truth. "The material evidence pertaining to the issue in dispute has been gathered. We will not prolong the proceedings because we have come up with a resolution."

He delivered the final, crushing verdict. "No doubt, Mike Pecayo is guilty as charged, based on the evidence found in his room," J. Peterson declared.

Mike and Whitey stood utterly exposed. They kept silent and were made humble, their arrogance shattered by the physical evidence, appearing visibly guilty and profoundly ashamed.

I was exhilarated by the outcome of the investigation and the total vindication. I immediately thanked the panel, Officer Al Fahkih, and his men for a job well done. The relief was immense: Again, the truth prevailed over the evil motives of those who aimed at destroying others for their own advantage.

The Consequences

The punishment for Mike was swift and severe, a final, public accounting for his multiple crimes:

Mike was expelled from his job and was immediately detained at the police precinct as a form of direct punishment for his grave offense. He would serve his term, which lasted until the end of his contract, without pay, effectively terminating his career and holding him accountable for both the frame-up and the illegal gambling operation.

Whitey's Penalty and Relocation

As an accessory to the crime, Whitey's punishment was severe, though less final than Mike's. He was immediately suspended for a week and, shortly thereafter, was relieved from his job at the center.

He was not expelled from the camp entirely but was relocated to a separate, punishing detail. His new role was to perform manual labor: he had to sweep the surroundings, cultivate the fertile soil in the backyard to plant trees and a variety of plants, and maintain the entire premises. He was now serving his time

alongside other obstinate workers who had also been relegated to this arduous duty to serve out their various penalties.

The Aftermath and Return to Normalcy

Mike's swift and severe punishment served as a stark and immediate lesson. It became a powerful **deterrent to his entire circle of friends** and followers, proving that the administration was willing to act decisively against internal corruption and violence. Consequently, his alleged close allies and hangers-on quickly **faded away**, the threat they once posed dissolving into caution and silence.

With the instigator removed and his network scattered, **normal life was finally restored**. We could all breathe easier and focus on our purpose. We kept moving **smoothly in the camp and at the jobsite**, finally able to operate without the constant psychological burden of fear, malice, or the threat of a frame-up.

Chapter 8

Friends, Indeed, A Friend in Doubt

January 1987: The Plot Advances

Hassan and Abdullah joined a large group of butlers who were conducting a dry run at the jobsite, specifically inspecting the guest suites where their secret plot was set to be executed.

Hassan quickly approached Neil in one of the rooms, feigning surprise and familiarity. "So you're assigned to this guest room?" Hassan asked, shaking Neil's hand and warmly tapping his shoulder, an act that surprised but delighted Neil.

"Yes. Are you the butler assigned here?" Neil asked.

"Exactly, what a coincidence," Hassan replied smoothly. "I have to check the entire room to familiarize myself and, of course, my assignment at the kitchen," he added.

Hassan's true intention immediately became clear. While speaking, his eyes began to move around, inspecting all corners of the large guest room. In the kitchen, he was very curious, meticulously opening the closets and even checking the separate electrical closet.

"Got any knowledge of the electrical system?" Neil asked, noticing the unusual focus.

"None, but I have to check and secure things within my jurisdiction as a standard operating procedure, sanitation, and

hygiene," Hassan quickly lied, masking his technical reconnaissance with bureaucratic jargon.

"Ah, okay," Neil said, accepting the explanation with easy confidence.

Hassan then moved to the highest-stakes question. "Got any idea who's going to check in here?" he asked.

"I understand that King Fahad will be the guest," Neil replied.

"Oh, really? I've never seen him in person. Hopefully, this time, I will," Hassan said, his excitement barely concealed. He then continued his cover, busying himself by checking and bringing out the kitchen wares he would need for his official charge. The groundwork for the plot against the high-profile target was now set.

Suite 26: The New Acquaintance

The activity continued in Suite 26 as Abdullah approached me, extending his hand. "I am glad to be working with you here," he said, his tone perfectly cordial.

"Yes, I am glad to be working with you here, too," I replied, returning the gesture.

Always conscious of the camp's networks, I asked, "What about your friends? Where are they assigned?"

"Hassan? I think he is assigned to suite 23," he replied.

"Ah, yes. It's where my friend, Neil, is assigned," I confirmed, connecting the dots.

“What a coincidence,” Abdullah remarked, the phrase now ringing with a calculated irony, given the true nature of their assignments.

He then gave me the status of the rest of their immediate group. “Ahmed and Moustafa, I think, are not so far from this building, but they’re still in the camp. They are coming in the afternoon,” he said. I was unknowingly gathering a list of names belonging to a dangerous, cohesive unit.

He began his inspection and immediately went into the kitchen. As a professional butler, he certainly knew what kitchen wares or stuff should be brought out, but that wasn't his immediate focus. Instead, he meticulously checked the closets and then paused at the circuit breaker.

"As a standard operating procedure, I have to secure the premises for sanitation and hygiene," he explained, offering the same boilerplate excuse Hassan had used earlier to cover his suspicious focus on the room's infrastructure.

"I understand," I replied, accepting his professionalism at face value, completely unaware that his true interest lay not in cleanliness, but in vulnerability and electrical access.

The Saboteurs' Final Planning

In the meantime, far from the jobsite, the team of saboteurs remaining at the quarters went on with their deadly plans.

“We have to execute the plan as scheduled, or we all suffer the consequences,” Ahmed stated, his voice tight with the pressure of the impending operation.

“Everything will be okay, we will install things at the right time,” Moustafa replied, trying to project a sense of calm control over the escalating plot.

“How much time is needed to set and detonate that stuff?” Ahmed pressed for the crucial technical detail.

“Twelve hours, the night before the day the conference starts,” Moustafa confirmed. This timing was critical, ensuring maximum impact just as the summit was about to commence.

“And that will also commence our quick escape from the area, right?” Ahmed asked, concerned with their exfiltration.

“Exactly,” Moustafa confirmed. The successful execution of the bombing was inextricably linked to their immediate and simultaneous disappearance from the compound.

“We will flee as quickly as possible through the branches of the trees at the back door,” Moustafa confirmed, finalizing their risky escape route.

“You must ascertain that they’re also at the exact location and time, where we will be fetched,” Ahmed pressed, ensuring the crucial external pickup was perfectly coordinated. “Everybody must be precise and should leave no traces,” he continued, emphasizing the need for absolute operational security.

Moustafa then voiced the major remaining obstacle. “The only problem we confront now is how we can surreptitiously bring this stuff into the center,” he said, recognizing that getting the explosive materials past security was their biggest challenge.

“These things must be planted in their right places, exactly the day before the summit, but we will have to think of bringing in these things first,” Ahmed conceded, focusing on the immediate need for insertion.

“First things first; we will do that,” Moustafa replied, concluding the meeting on a note of chilling determination.

Planning the Breach

The following day, the tension was palpable as they still needed to discuss and organize the execution of their disastrous plot in the center.

“No way we can bring these things inside the center,” Ahmed worried, stating the obvious and most critical obstacle. “First, how can we hide these pieces of stuff from the military inspectors? They have become so strict, especially now that the day is drawing near,” he said. The security was tightening, and their window was closing. “Aside, if we were ever able to avoid the highway inspection, how can we avoid the sentry at the gate?” he added, highlighting the layers of security they had to penetrate.

Hassan countered by focusing on the escape, producing the vicinity plan of the center. The plan clearly showed the layout that would lead to the back door of the building, an area where shrubs and trees would be their only concealment to be able to sneak out during their eventual escape. The risk of getting the material in was high, but the route for getting themselves out was meticulously mapped.

“This is the only route we could use to get away; therefore, this would be the only route we could use to bring in these kinds of stuff,” Hassan declared, establishing the high-risk, high-reward strategy: their escape route would also be their infiltration route.

“You’re right, and it is useless to carry these things with us at all,” Ahmed conceded, acknowledging the difficulty of

personally smuggling large, dangerous materials past multiple checkpoints.

“Exactly. We’ll ask Samir to drive these things to the place,” Hassan said, naming the external contact who would deliver the materials.

“Impossible! Samir cannot come nearer to the fortress! He could be seen from the checkpoint above,” Moustafa objected, recognizing the danger of involving an outsider near the perimeter.

“It’s possible! Samir and Haji will do it at night,” Hassan insisted, committing to the operation under the cover of darkness. He then revealed the ingenious, treacherous method of avoiding the main gate. “We ought to fix a harness when coming in and out of the wall linking the trees. All they have to do is stop at the end of the road and walk all the way to the fortress,” Hassan explained. They would use a pulley system over the boundary wall, leveraging the dense tree cover to bypass all vehicular checkpoints and sentries on foot.

“That’s around two to three kilometers walk to reach the place,” Moustafa pointed out, confirming the long, exhausting approach. “But they have to avoid the searchlights. All they have to do is cast the pieces of stuff over the fortress to the branches of the trees. We’ll take it in the daytime since that corner is uninhabited, but only to avoid the roving security personnel that roam around every hour,” he explained, detailing the high risk of exposure.

“Do you think it would be possible when the height of the fence is about twenty feet high? Samir and Haji may not be good throwers at that towering height,” Abdullah replied, pointing out the crucial, physical flaw in the plan. The height of the wall made a simple toss impossible.

The realization hit them hard. They became reluctant and skeptical of the plan. For a minute, silence prevailed, and everyone was left to think profoundly about a viable resolution.

“Yes, it may not be possible. Let us think of other means,” Hassan finally said in a low voice, abandoning the idea.

The day ended without any solution found. The dangerous materials remained outside the perimeter, and the execution of their plot was put off for another day.

The Sardine Can Solution

While on the bus on their way to the jobsite, Abdullah happened to look down at his bag, which contained canned goods resting on his lap. An idea suddenly struck him.

“What about putting those small parts inside the sardines and tuna boxes, or cans with the can opener?” Abdullah suggested to Hassan, finally offering a plausible solution to their smuggling problem.

“What about passing through the metal door detector?” Hassan immediately asked, pointing out the major security threat.

“The security personnel know that it normally alarms when the food in cans and the can opener are passed through it,” Abdullah explained with chilling clarity. He had observed the flaw in the system. “That’s why they have to inspect your bags manually, and they sometimes forego further scrutiny when one tends to be expressly friendly,” he added. The strategy was set: use the predictable false alarms of the metal detector as an excuse for a quick, superficial manual check, which they would bypass with a friendly, disarming demeanor.

"Really? You've got an idea. Let me check it myself, to see if it works," Hassan said, a dangerous smile spreading across his face.

"You got canned goods or snacks and a can opener in your bag? We can put things inside an empty can of sardines or, if not fitted, we could put it inside the box of sardines," Abdullah explained, detailing the ingenious deception.

"Exactly, plus keys, I always bring every day. Try it for yourself," Abdullah confirmed, providing a second, plausible source for the alarm.

They quickly prepared empty cans and sardine boxes to place their bomb components, mixing them in with their legitimate, filled cans.

Testing the Breach

At the gate of the center, the daring Hassan stepped forward to test the idea.

They began their performance, speaking casually in Arabic to disarm the guard. "Salam, Officer, what a fine day, isn't it?" Hassan greeted, projecting effortless friendliness.

"Yes, a good day to start working," replied the sentry officer.

The tension broke the moment the alarm sounded as Hassan passed through the metal door detector, just as they had planned.

The Successful Breach

Hassan immediately gave his bag and opened it to the officer. As predicted, the sentry only spontaneously made a plain view and a glance at his eyes, quickly noting the innocuous cans and

the plausible cause for the alarm. He didn't bother with a thorough manual search.

"Okay, thank you," Hassan said, retrieving his bag.

"Salam," the officer replied, dismissing him.

Hassan quickly found Abdullah. "Got it?" Abdullah asked, his voice low with anticipation.

"Excellent, it worked," Hassan replied, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. The flaw in the security system was confirmed. The idea worked and gave the group a big chance of perpetrating their plans.

Finalizing the Smuggling Tactic

Immediately, the team divided the bomb components and went out to purchase the necessary cover materials: canned goods with boxes, both empty and clean. They meticulously checked if the components would fit the containers.

Ahmed finalized the chilling plan for the shipment. "This will not be noticeable at all," he stated. The formula was set: "Putting five canned sardines together with boxes, two cans are with pieces of stuff, and three are full. Squared boxes are also filled in by wrapping them with scotch tape to hold them inside to avoid creating unnecessary noise. Then, I will put it inside my bag full of things," Ahmed said, ensuring the small, heavy packages would be lost in a plausible assortment of items, ready to bypass security and bring disaster inside the fortress. Here is a detailed and highly tense rewrite of the saboteurs' final internal debate before executing the smuggling plan.

"But, be careful, the sentry personnel may not always be the same. Beware of their behavior," Hassan warned the group, acknowledging the high variability of the human element in their plan.

"What if it fails?" Moustafa asked, his reluctance betraying genuine fear.

“How will it fail?” Abdullah challenged.

“I mean, the alarm sounds because of these things?” Moustafa clarified, worried about the bomb components triggering a more serious response.

Hassan quickly provided the final, confident assurance. “As I said, the alarm normally sounds when anyone passes through with bags of stuff, like canned goods and keys. That’s why the security has to check your bag individually after passing through the metal door detector.”

He detailed the crucial psychological deception: “But, chances are, he may overlook what’s all inside your bag because we normally have canned food, keys, and small tools used for work on the jobsite. He would always think that the alarm sounds because of the metal or can opener, keys, and small bread knives.”

He concluded with the key cover story: “Our part-time job is as an electrician, and our pieces of equipment are electrical in nature, so there is no reason for questioning us about their use. That is a hundred percent passable at the gate.”

He then delivered the final, chilling ultimatum. “You’re on your own if you fail it,” he added.

“You will not fail it, right?” Ahmed asked, the question laced with the pressure of the entire operation.

“That’s as simple as answering the question; what is it for?” Moustafa replied, confirming the necessary lie.

“Everybody will make it, right? Then, let’s move on,” Hassan said, ending the discussion with a commanding call to action. The plan was set, the lie was rehearsed, and the deadly materials were about to cross the final barrier.

Chapter 9

Enemy Plan A and B

January 30, 1987: Infiltration

As planned, the entire team moved simultaneously. They all brought their bomb components, disguised as canned goods, with them through the gate immediately. They were all in a **haste to execute their plan A.**

The moment they approached the security checkpoint, a new problem arose. **"See, the security staff has changed.** It's not the same personnel that used to inspect our stuff," **Hassan whispered,** his voice tight with alarm.

"Yes, what shall we do?" **Abdullah** asked.

Hassan quickly made a terrifying, high-stakes decision. **"We have to go through with it.** Kill them if you are pushed against the wall, and run outside the gate toward the open field. Anyway, there are only two of them. **Watch out for the watchtower.** They might keep firing when they see you," Hassan said. He immediately switched back to instruction. **"Keep calm, relax, take it easy,"** he continued.

"No problem, I'm tactful," Abdullah whispered, acknowledging the extreme threat but maintaining composure.

They reached the gate and passed through the metal door detector as the **alarm sounded**—the expected signal. Again, they spoke casually in Arabic.

"Your identification card, gentleman, please; turn it on," the new officer said, his tone professional, demanding compliance with the standard security routine.

"Yes, sir, sorry," Hassan said, smoothly turning on his ID and simultaneously **showing his open bag** to the officer. The guard, following the established, relaxed protocol for false alarms, gave the bag a quick, superficial glance.

“Okay, go. Next,” the officer said, already turning his attention to the next person in line. “ID, ID, please; display it properly,” he continued.

Clever but extremely **tense because of the breathtaking scenario**, the team practically **made it inside the conference center**. Through sheer audacity and clandestine moves, they successfully executed their **plan A of bringing in their stuff for detonation**. The critical first step was complete. Next was the dangerous task of distributing the bomb components in their respective suite assignments.

“We’ve made it inside. I believe you’ve successfully hidden them from the eyes of others,” Hassan whispered, the relief and excitement of successful infiltration palpable in his voice. “Now, going to plan B, is the installation in the fuse breaker. I believe that you know what you are going to do next,” he said, giving the final instruction to initiate the assembly of the devices.

“Yes, and we are just at the right time, and we’re almost there,” Ahmed replied, confirming the readiness to proceed.

“It has been rush hour now, so we have to keep moving,” Hassan added, urging haste before the building settled into a quieter, less chaotic rhythm where their clandestine movements would become far more noticeable. The clock was ticking, and they needed to plant the evidence of their plot before the final, highest-level security sweep.

The Final Installation

One week before the summit, the entire team had successfully mobilized. They made their daring attempt to install their time bombs at the designated areas. In other words, they were able to execute all their plans A and B: the components had been smuggled in, and the devices were now being assembled and placed in the suite's fuse breakers.

However, beyond their knowledge, I had been subtly sensing the suspicious moves of Abdullah in his kitchen chores. His meticulous focus on non-essential areas and his nervous energy didn't match the simple task of a butler.

I decided to test his composure. "You're very busy here, but, if you don't mind, I can collect the trash now," I said, knowing the trash was the easiest place to hide discarded wrappers or parts.

Abdullah's reaction was immediate and slightly panicked. "Sure, take them all," he replied, masking his relief with urgency. "And please put the trash cans back quickly. I got some more here," he added, eager to get the potentially incriminating bags out of the room before I could notice anything.

Eavesdropping on the Conspirators

Later, Ahmed arrived and immediately began talking to Abdullah. I was keenly aware of their presence and tried to return quickly after dumping the garbage, hoping to catch a stray word.

When I re-entered the suite, Ahmed greeted me while both men were absorbed in their tasks. I couldn't stay in their immediate place of assignment since I wasn't allowed to loiter during working hours. I had to maintain my cover, keeping busy by moving around the living room, bedroom, and hallway to sweep and look professional.

I found a legitimate reason to get close when I went to fix the curtain rod at the back of the dining room. The location was perfect. Though their voices were low and in a different language, I managed to hear the two talking in Arabic on the

opposite side of the room. The need for absolute secrecy gave me a chance to finally gather evidence against the two saboteurs.

Confidently believing that nobody was around, they continued chatting in a mixed Arabic dialect, a detail that made me intensely curious while I concentrated on the sounds, trying to grasp the Arabic words I had already learned.

It so happened that the circuit breaker was just behind the wall where I was working on the curtain rod. I knew they were already working closer to it because I began to hear their voices clearly, their utterances growing louder in their haste and focus.

During that time, I clearly heard their conversation.

“Check the door and make sure this area is secured, quick,” Ahmed said.

Ahmed stepped away for a moment, quickly ascertaining that the doors leading to the dining room and the kitchen were closed.

“The area is secured,” Abdullah confirmed.

“Now, give me that stuff and the wiring,” Ahmed demanded, the words clearly signaling the final stage of assembly.

He then issued the chilling operational command. “Remember, on the day of the summit, when the timer is set, everything is gone here. So you have to set the timer twelve hours before the day of the summit, meaning nighttime, during your working shift,” he continued, dictating the moment of the explosion.

"I got it," Abdullah replied. The knowledge that a bomb was being placed just inches away, targeted at the highest-level guests, was a terrifying realization.

Ahmed finalized his instructions, his voice low and urgent. "While this is already installed, you will **ascertain that nobody attempts to open this breaker**, nor will you let anyone know about this thing."

"You will **activate this exactly twelve hours before that very day**, and, quickly, you will leave this place and run to the back door. **Samir and Haji will be on the other side, fixing the harness for our escape.** Understood?" Ahmed said, laying out the chilling exit plan.

"**Understood,**" Abdullah replied as they quickly parted in haste.

Right after hearing their conversation, I was **shocked with great fear**. The reality of the bomb had hit me. I immediately **ran over to Neil** in his suite.

"**What's wrong with you? What happened?**" Neil asked me anxiously, seeing the terror etched on my face.

"**Is there anyone with you here?**" I asked, my voice barely a whisper, needing absolute security before I could speak.

"None. Hassan went out," he replied.

"Listen. **We are all in trouble here,**" I said, finally letting the words out.

"What trouble?" he demanded.

"Ahmed and Abdullah were in the dining room right on the opposite side of the living room, where I was fixing the curtain rod. I sensed that they were fixing something at the breaker, and I **clearly heard their conversation that the timer would be set twelve hours before the summit, and everything would be gone,**" I anxiously uttered, struggling to get the terrifying details out.

"**What?! Did you hear it clearly? Are you sure?**" Neil asked, his own anxiety spiking.

“That’s exactly what I heard. **Twelve hours before the summit, everything is going to blow up in here,**” I confirmed.

“Okay, calm down,” Neil said, though he was visibly shaken. “So, in other words, **our hunch is correct. They’re saboteurs,**” he concluded, the gravity of the word hanging heavily in the air.

Here is a detailed and highly tense rewrite of the conversation and the immediate danger that follows.

Escalating the Crisis

“Exactly. We’ve to be careful now. We’ve got to find out what’s in store there, and in your breaker,” I said in a low voice, urging caution and action.

“We will do that. But, first, we have to check it before we do anything else, right?” he said, prioritizing physical confirmation.

“Yes. Anyway, we still have time to do more sleuthing,” I replied, still operating under the assumption that further investigation was needed.

I quickly considered our options for alerting the authorities. “I think we have to inform Charles and Peterson about this danger. But not anybody else because we could get killed and others, too, if they become panicky,” I said, focusing on a minimal-exposure report.

“No, not now, not until we confirm what’s stored here,” Neil countered, still clinging to the need for hard evidence.

“But it was very clear. It’s confirmed; the time bomb will explode in twelve hours. That was exactly what I heard. We don’t have to sleuth for them further. Time is running out,” I argued, the urgency of the threat overriding the need for proof.

“Yes, but we have to calm down and think about our next move first,” I said, my mouth dried up from the adrenaline. “We have to get back to the camp right away and inform the office about this.”

“But how can we do that when the bus returns later?” he asked, pointing out the immediate logistical trap.

“We stay cool and calm, in the meantime, until the bus returns,” I replied, forcing myself into a state of temporary control.

“Shall we tell it to the security, or run away and save ourselves?” he asked, facing the terrible choice between heroism and survival.

The Sudden Encounter

The conversation was abruptly halted when I went out to the hallway. Hassan came across my way, startling me.

“Hi, Paul, where have you been? It seems a very busy day, right?” he asked, his tone too casual, too observant.

“Yes. I just need to see Neil for something,” I replied, trying to keep my voice even and my face blank, praying my panic didn’t show.

The Close Call

“The day is fast approaching, isn’t it?” Hassan insinuated, his eyes studying me for any sign of recognition or fear.

“What day?” I asked, deliberately playing ignorant.

“The summit,” he said simply.

“Oh, yes. Dry run here and there,” I replied, keeping my tone casual and professional.

“Okay, bye,” he said, finally moving on.

“Okay, see you,” I replied, managing to keep my relief hidden.

Just as I reached the entrance of the suite, Abdullah appeared before me, creating another heart-stopping moment.

“Paul, I have been leaving for a while to see Charles,” he said.

“Okay, is there anybody coming here to see you?” I asked, trying to glean any information about his schedule.

“No, except for Ahmed. Just tell him that I will be back in a few minutes.” He was leaving me, the only person who knew his plot, to watch his area.

“I will do that,” I said.

“Thanks,” he replied as he hurried away.

The Frustrating Search

With both conspirators temporarily gone, I knew I had a narrow window. While waiting for the bus to arrive, I immediately took advantage of the time. I quietly locked the door of the dining room and tried to see what was hidden.

I was instantly frustrated by their security measures. When I looked, I saw that all the closets and, most critically, the circuit

breaker boxes were locked up. They had taken precautions against exactly this kind of inspection. I had definitive proof of their plot through overheard conversation, but now I had no physical evidence to show anyone.

"How can I now prove that my allegations are true?" I asked Neil, my voice tight with frustration. "It would be absurd to ask them for the keys when we are not even allowed to enter their place of work," I said, knowing the impossibility of getting physical evidence.

Neil didn't have an answer, so I plunged into the ultimate, horrifying question. "Don't worry, we'll just keep our eyes on them. But how about the twelve-hour deadline until detonating that thing? Shall we let time expire, or shall we all blow up to death here?" The choice was brutally clear: risk immediate exposure by reporting an unproven threat, or wait for the proof that might cost us, and King Fahad, our lives.

The Agonizing Delay

"No. We'll try to keep track of their movements and, if we fail, coerce them before the twelve-hour deadline," Neil insisted, choosing a desperate, high-risk middle ground. "We shall not reveal this thing yet, until we have proven it is real. Otherwise, we would be in great trouble."

"I tell you, it was very clear," I argued, frustrated by his hesitation. "I heard them talking about the timer. I would not be wrong, and my hearing is very sound and clear," I said.

"We will get in more trouble if we just accuse those people of something very serious when we don't have proof. We have to find out first," Neil explained, his logic cold and terrifyingly sound.

He laid out the devastating counter-argument: "Aside from those people who were known to Charles by their good jobs. So how can we be sure that the timer they were talking about was the time bomb? For your information, part of their job includes electrical works, so we do not know what exactly they were talking about," he added. He was right; without physical evidence, my testimony could be dismissed as a misunderstanding of technical jargon, putting us in Mike's previous position—accusing a "good worker" with no proof.

"Okay, let us find out first so we can be sure. Anyway, there is still time," I conceded, knowing his prudence was necessary. "Otherwise, we could both run outside when the bus comes to get back to the camp quickly," I said, establishing our final, emergency escape plan.

The Desperate Search

Deep inside, we were so panicky and scared that we truly didn't know what to do. To confirm they were talking about a bomb, we frantically began to search every corner of our rooms, checking the closets, cabinets, and small storage spaces, but we found nothing. The only thing left to inspect were the circuit breakers, which remained frustratingly locked.

"You broke the cabinet in the stairway?" Neil asked, pointing to the damaged utility door.

"I had no choice but to get this ax from the cabinet to break the lock of the breaker," I said, justifying the rash destruction with the potential for disaster.

Since we were alone in the suite, we used the ax to break open all the circuit breakers. We searched through the wiring, the boxes, and the mechanisms, but to our utter confusion and disbelief, we found no time bomb.

“Where did they plant that time bomb? I am sure they planted time bombs somewhere,” I insisted, the certainty of what I’d heard conflicting violently with the physical evidence.

A chilling thought struck me. “They cheated me. Perhaps, they knew I was behind the wall when they were talking about it,” I said. They hadn’t been making a plan; they had been setting a trap of disinformation.

“We have to find them,” Neil replied, the focus now shifting from the bomb to the saboteurs themselves.

Chapter 10

Delegations Arrive

February 2, 1987: The Summit Commences

During the early morning, the media was in full swing, covering the arrival of the first delegation of the head of state at the Kuwait International Airport. This signaled the commencement of the full-blast service and the long-awaited opening of the first conference center for the Islamic leaders' convergence in the state.

Tight security was implemented everywhere. Police motorcades swept all possible obstacles along the road to the conference center, locking down the entire area. Inside the fortress-like center, the hotel staff were both eager and tense while waiting to assist the VIP guests as they arrived. The accommodations were fully prepared to house them, a ticking clock hanging over the perfection of the suites where the saboteurs had just planted their devices.

The Illuminated Arrival

Subsequently, more delegations arrived until evening, a steady stream of power and luxury. Keeping all the lights blazing in every corner of the building complex livened up the entire conference center and the surrounding hotels.

The scene became even more illuminated and lively by the throng of media men, their lenses flickering incessantly at the important figures as they stepped out of their shiny and elegant limousines.

We, the staff, stood at attention, a synchronized and professional facade. We remained perfectly still, our uniforms

immaculate and our shoes neatly and well-polished, positioned at the entrance of the doors, ready to greet and welcome our respective, high-profile guests in. The operation was now in full swing, placing the saboteurs and their hidden devices into their final, terrifying positions.

Mingling with Power

Anxious and reeling with mixed emotions, it was hard to accept that the entire scene wasn't just an illusion. The reality of being in this very place, mingling with high-profile people whom we had previously only seen in the media and on television, was surreal.

But it was undeniably real. We were not just observers; we would personally serve them, shake their hands, and stay with them until the duration of the meeting. The immense responsibility of service, now dangerously intertwined with the secret of the hidden bomb, was a crushing weight.

The assignments were as prestigious and high-stakes as scheduled:

My personal guest was President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Neil's guest, staying in the suite where the bomb was planted, was King Fahad of Saudi Arabia.

Adam's guest was President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Willy's guest was President Hafez Assad of Syria.

We were now the most intimate attendants to the most powerful men in the region, and we were the only ones who knew their lives were hanging by a twelve-hour timer.

The Arrival of Saddam Hussein

I could not describe it, nor could I utter a word, when President Saddam Hussein arrived in the midst of his full battle-gearred army. I was so overwhelmed that I did not even extend my hand to shake his. Instead, I was forced to step away from the door when haggard-looking armed escorts swept their way into the room. However, I was able to see Saddam's face at a distance as they sneaked in.

I proceeded to the kitchen and began to serve the entourage with canned drinks, while the Arab-speaking butlers handled serving Saddam and his aide with their food and drinks. The armed men, around fifteen in number, looked utterly exhausted. They just lay on the floor at the corner of the hallway near the entrance to the living room, their only concern being to keep asking for canned drinks. Their AK-47s hung around their chests, and some were simply laid down beside them. Some of the men spoke English poorly, but others were native speakers of Arabic, increasing the immediate feeling of being utterly surrounded by a foreign, military force.

Entrapped by the Clock

Time ticked too slowly for me at that moment, an agonizing crawl toward the twelve-hour deadline. I had to physically hold myself together to mask my surging anxiety, desperately hoping that my shift would end quickly so I could leave the place and act on the threat.

I didn't know where to stand or stay, since the entire space was completely occupied by the new security detail, leaving only the kitchen as a neutral zone. Paradoxically, I had a big job at that very moment: the armed men were creating chaos. They littered empty cans, pieces of tissue paper, and kitchen utensils everywhere as soon as they were finished. I had no option, and no right to complain; all I could do was just perform the mundane, repetitive task I was told to do, cleaning up the mess while the knowledge of the bomb weighed on my conscience.

What was even more annoying were the ashes and butts of cigarettes that were carelessly discarded in every area, while billows of smoke hovered around and quickly polluted the pleasant scent of the hallway and living room. The clean and shiny marble floor I had painstakingly maintained before they came was now scarred with dark stains left from the cigarette ashes.

The stains were difficult to remove, but I deliberately did not prioritize removing them because of the soldiers' constant presence. I didn't dare to clean the floor properly; I did not want to disturb them, or else they might get annoyed and escalate the situation. My only goal was to remain invisible and silent. I would only be truly delighted and relieved when my time and my replacement would finally come, allowing me to escape the room and report the terrifying truth of the hidden bomb.

The Summit Begins: The Clock is Ticking

The inauguration of the conference center was officially opened by the Emir of Kuwait, a ceremonial event attended by all Islamic heads of state. This was immediately followed by the opening ceremony and a formal speech by the Emir himself, which drew every high-profile guest to the main hall.

This centralized event was the saboteurs' signal. Meanwhile, the team of conspirators was scheduled to set the timer in their respective areas while the delegates were attending the ceremony. The final, twelve-hour countdown to detonation was about to begin.

Neil and I had reached the point of no return. We were set to execute an action before they could activate the time bomb, knowing that once that timer was set, our chance to save

everyone would shrink to a desperate, single-digit race against the clock.

The Interruption

With the delegates now attending the opening ceremony, I knew the saboteurs were moving to set the timer. I had to create a distraction.

“Hi, Abdullah, can I have some food and drinks before they come?” I asked him while he was busy preparing meals for the guests—a perfect excuse to enter his zone.

“Sure, take some, and please make it fast, as you know that this is a restricted area, as we are only allowed to stay here,” he replied, his urgency confirming his focus was elsewhere.

“No problem. I will get out quickly. Thanks,” I said.

“You’re welcome,” he replied.

I took a plate and moved behind the door of the dining room. From my vantage point, I cleverly took a quick look at his movements. I saw him at the circuit breaker, and in the same way he kept checking the time, he took a glimpse at his wristwatch—the final check before setting the timer.

I knew I couldn't wait any longer. I abruptly knocked at the door with my elbow, causing a sudden, loud noise. The interruption worked perfectly: it called his attention and successfully interrupted his action, prompting him to immediately leave the breaker half-opened and step away from the device. The countdown was averted, for now.

“What?!” he barked, clearly astonished by the sudden noise and my presence.

“A bottle of water, please. I need water before I get completely parched,” I said, keeping my request mundane to mask my true intent.

“Just take it from the refrigerator,” he barked, his impatience obvious, as he definitively stepped away from the breaker.

“Anything wrong?” I asked, pushing the limit to see his reaction and draw attention away from the open panel.

“Nothing. I was conducting a thorough inspection as a standard operating procedure,” he lied quickly, reverting to the conspirators' default excuse. “You may go now,” he said, his tone a clear dismissal. I had successfully interrupted the timer setting, but he was now intensely suspicious.

The Critical Hours

During this occasion, everybody was extremely busy, as the day of the main event was fast approaching and the conference center was running at full capacity.

Just as the chaos peaked, Charles arrived with Neil and requested that we carry some loads of store supplies downstairs as buffer stock for the duration of the conference. This provided the perfect, hectic cover.

The situation immediately prompted Abdullah and Hassan to seize the opportunity. They needed to move while we were distracted. They quickly snuck away from the hotel and headed toward the main conference center, which was approximately three hundred meters away. This was their final walk toward the detonation site.

“Tomorrow morning, everything here is going to blow up,” Hassan whispered to Ahmed as they prepared to depart. “So,

say goodbye to our friends here, Ahmed. Say goodbye to the king and dictator.” The implication was a final, cold farewell to the people whose deaths they had engineered.

“Yes, goodbye to our one-time friends!” Ahmed exclaimed with cruel finality. They were gone to activate the timer.

The Twelve-Hour Countdown Begins

After setting up the timer, the saboteurs executed their exfiltration. They escaped through the back door, where the branches of some trees held their harnesses that helped them slide over the perimeter wall. A backup car of two was lurking behind them, ready to flee into the tranquility of the night. They had to skillfully avoid the searchlights that could trigger the watchtower security to pepper them with bullets.

When Neil and I came back, we hurriedly went to the dining room and confirmed our fear: the door was locked up already, indicating they had done their work. We knew the timer was set to activate in twelve hours.

Meanwhile, in the conference center, the preliminary summit was adjourned, and the delegations were beginning to leave for their accommodation, unknowingly walking toward their execution.

“Hurry up! They are gone! We have no more time, and no choice but to tell Charles before we go home tonight,” I urged.

“Let’s alert the security to stop and search those bastards,” Neil said, focused on catching the culprits.

“They could be armed and ready to kill. We have to be very careful; otherwise, we will all be harmed by them,” I warned. The immediate danger, however, was in the room. “We have to

find a way to break open the breakers and stop the timer!" I added.

The Frantic, Failed Search

Since the circuit breakers were locked up again, we grabbed the ax and hurriedly went back to strike the padlock, and it gave way. But to our utter shock and confusion, there was nothing in it again. We rushed to Neil's suite, broke open that box, and yet found nothing in it. We were baffled and realized we had been cheated once more.

"It's nowhere, but where exactly did they plant it?" I demanded, the reality of the situation becoming a terrifying riddle.

"Does it mean there's no bomb scare?" Neil replied, desperately clinging to the hope that the entire thing had been a cruel, elaborate hoax designed only to make us panic.

"There is a bomb scare! I firmly believe that they planted time bombs somewhere around here," I exclaimed, refusing to accept the evidence of the empty boxes. "But the thing is, they are playing a dirty trick! They set up a fake plant to throw us off!"

"Are you sure about what you heard and saw?" Neil asked doubtfully, his face pale with confusion and fear.

"Don't you trust me at all?" I demanded, my voice shaking. "If my allegation is not true, then where are they now? They have abandoned their duty here! It means they have done their stupid thing. They are already escaping by now," I argued anxiously, pointing to the saboteurs' flight as the only necessary proof.

“What do we do now?” Neil asked with genuine dismay, finally recognizing the severity of the crisis.

“Time is running out; the clock is ticking,” I insisted. “The time is nine o’clock in the evening. Our relievers will be here by then. The countdown for twelve hours has begun, and tomorrow morning, everything here is going to blow up.”

I made the final, crucial decision. “We ought to inform everybody, right now, to save their lives,” I added, knowing that without physical proof, we were risking everything, but it was the only option left.

Reporting the Bomb: Dismissal

Within a few agonizing minutes, the **delegations and the heads of state entered their respective guest rooms**—the targets were now stationary. Neil and I quickly left the hotel for the bus. When we arrived back at the camp, after hastily taking our dinner, we immediately proceeded to the office to see **Charles and J. Peterson**.

I launched into the terrifying report.

“Are you crazy?! What are you talking about?” Charles demanded, his face tight with disbelief and annoyance.

“No, sir. **Everything is as true and real as I told you.** There are barely a few hours left until tomorrow morning, maybe 8:00 or 9:00, and **everything is going to blow up**,” I insisted, my voice tight with urgency. “The only problem is, we don’t know exactly where they planted it.”

“Augustino, are you sick? Are you okay?” J. Peterson asked, treating the warning as a mental health crisis.

“I am very fine, and sure, sir. **Try to find out if these people are still in the camp, and on the jobsite**, and you will know

that I am telling you the truth," I countered, offering the saboteurs' sudden flight as proof.

Peterson doubled down on his dismissal, falling back on psychological excuses and the saboteurs' clean records. **"You may take a rest, Paul; you are just tired, scared, and preoccupied by the border crisis.** You think too much. Let your mind rest and get rid of your loneliness and anxiety. We will be all right here. The meeting is going to finish soon. Everybody's going to go home safe," J. Peterson insisted. **"These people are credible and have flaunted excellent work records** from their hotel companies. Remember, when a person is depressed, negative thoughts enter their mind. You need to rest, Paul. **You may go,**" he added, effectively sending me away to wait for the explosion.

The Ticking Clock: Confirmation

John Peterson, whom everyone called simply J. Peterson, was clearly **irked and became restless** after dismissing my warning. We returned to our quarters, paralyzed and **uncertain about what was going to happen the next day.** We tried to rest to regain strength for tomorrow's horrific ordeal.

The truth arrived that night. The office received an **emergency report** confirming that **Hassan and his team were gone.**

J. Peterson and Charles immediately learned about this information, which was amplified by the discovery of a chilling piece of evidence: a **harness was found at the back of the hotel among the trees.** This tangible proof of their escape route **confirmed the status of the bomb scare;** my claims were true.

As early as **four o'clock in the morning,** Neil and I were **summoned by J. Peterson to the office.** They confirmed the report: they had checked the saboteurs' quarters and found them empty. With no other questions asked—the disappearance was proof enough—**J. Peterson and Charles rushed to the jobsite** with military personnel and bomb

experts to search and secure the five-story building where we were assigned. The final, desperate race to find the bomb had begun.

Manhunt and Intensive Search

Manhunt operations were immediately ordered by the military police. Forces were deployed to all possible routes and gateways for Hassan and his team. The pursuit prompted military units to blockade all possible routes to the seas and borders where the saboteurs might escape.

Meanwhile, a desperate internal search began. Extensive efforts had been exerted to locate any trace of time bombs within the building, from the suites down to the basement, and even on the rooftop of our hotel base.

The security forces recognized the enormous risk of a broader sweep. While there were other clusters of hotel buildings nearby to search, doing so would immediately disrupt the comfort of resting guests—the very dignitaries they were supposed to be protecting. Therefore, the focal point was our hotel building, the one where the perpetrators were assigned and where they were strongly suspected of having planted the bombs. The clock was ticking, and every second spent searching an empty space increased the danger to the most powerful men in the region.

Seven O'Clock: The Massive Evacuation

At seven o'clock—just two hours before the potential detonation—the crisis reached its peak. J. Peterson and Charles gave the definitive, desperate order: they instructed the security forces to commence the massive evacuation of our hotel building. Simultaneously, more military personnel and APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) arrived outside the gates, creating an intimidating cordon around the premises.

The gravity of the situation was now impossible to hide. The heads of state quickly fixed themselves and were immediately ordered to proceed to the safer place at the conference center, the assumption being that the target was the hotel, not the central complex.

The security perimeter collapsed. Simultaneously, all the rest of the hotel buildings nearby were alerted, and their staff were ordered to conduct the total evacuation of all guests, who were also swiftly directed to converge on the main conference center. Chaos reigned as the most powerful men in the region were rushed from their luxurious suites, fleeing a bomb that no one could find.

The Agonizing Wait

Teams of bomb experts kept arriving in waves to assist in the frantic search of the hotel buildings. Meanwhile, we, the staff, were kept far away. Charles ordered all hotel workers to proceed to the conference center, the designated safe zone, while the hotels were cordoned off to prevent further crisis. Everyone was profoundly scared, waiting with dread for what would happen on the anticipated twelfth-hour deadline for the detonation of the bombs.

The sense of hopelessness was palpable among the evacuees. "How could they find those bombs among the cluster of hotel buildings nearby when the time is almost out?" asked one terrified Arab guest.

"There are lots of bomb experts with their bomb sniffing dogs searching, and they know the time limit for them to conduct their search," J. Peterson replied, trying to project a calm confidence he clearly didn't feel.

“At least everybody has been evacuated from those buildings,” Charles said, acknowledging that they had at least mitigated the human cost, even if they couldn't avert the catastrophe. The next few hours were a countdown to either discovery or disaster.

The Evacuation and Address

The main lobby of the conference center was jammed, crowded not only by the high-profile guests but also by all the hotel staff and security personnel who had scampered from the hotels to find refuge. The safe zone felt less safe due to the sheer panic and congestion.

In this chaotic atmosphere, John Peterson stepped up to the podium in the presence of all the guests evacuated from their accommodations. He had to calm the most powerful and threatened audience in the world.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, especially our honored guests from the different Islamic nations,” J. Peterson began, his voice strained. “I am sorry for the inconvenience and that we are disrupted by this crisis, but rest assured, we will be able to settle things as soon as possible in order to provide you with the assurance of comfort and safety, in the meantime, here at the conference center.”

He concluded with a desperate plea. “I hope for your kind understanding, and please keep yourself at ease, and everything will get back to normal,” J. Peterson pleaded to the guests.

To everyone's surprise, one guest offered an understanding reply. “Yes, we understand you. This is normal on an occasion like this, especially where disputes among hostile countries are being tackled,” the guest replied, attributing the security risk to

the complex political environment rather than a failure of security.

The Fugitives' Blame Game

Somewhere along the Kuwait Bay toward the port, Hassan's team was not on good terms. The stress of the escape and the realization of their failure had turned them against each other.

"You have all become snails," Hassan snapped. "We would have come to the port earlier had it not been for your tardiness. I believe the boat is right there waiting for us."

"I know that we are now being haunted by any concerned authorities," Abdullah said, acknowledging the massive manhunt.

"There was one thing we should not have done!" Ahmed exclaimed, his voice tight with regret.

"Then, what was it?" Hassan demanded.

"We did not intend to let Paul hear our tales. It would prompt him to tell tales," Ahmed replied, identifying the crucial mistake: the staged conversation was overheard by the wrong person.

"That was really a great mistake! Our trick has fired back on us!" Moustafa exclaimed. "We did not know that time would also be our failure. We did not make a fast enough escape."

"It was not that easy! The harness was not that good," Abdullah retorted, defending his part in the slow exfiltration. "If we had made a wrong move, the watchtower would finish us all!"

“Stop it! What’s done is done!” Hassan finally stated, silencing the argument with a cold dose of reality. “All we have to do now is face the consequences of our failure.”

The Capture

In a distant area along the opposite direction, fast-approaching APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) suddenly appeared. Barrels were aimed, and in a few moments, Hassan and company stopped almost at the steps of the port. They quickly stepped out of the vehicle and grabbed their rifles. They hid and were ready for any eventuality.

The army personnel immediately demanded that they surrender unconditionally.

“It’s the same thing; we would not escape death, even if we surrender,” Hassan stated with grim finality. “Who among you would like to give up?”

Nobody answered; they had accepted their fate and had been prepared for it beforehand.

“The boat is hanging around there, not too far! Get there and save yourselves!” Ahmed desperately ordered, realizing they had been cornered and urging the others to take the final, impossible risk.

The Shootout and Desperate Escape

They began to release the first fire, initiating the desperate battle. They ran as fast as they could toward the waiting boat while a rain of fiery bullets began to drop on them. They moved like trained soldiers and were agonizingly close to reaching the motorboat. They exchanged fire, but the military response was devastating: Hassan was killed immediately.

Abdullah exposed himself, running only a few steps away from the boat before he was hit and fell into the water.

Ahmed, Moustafa, Samir, and Haji kept firing from their stationary position, laying down cover fire. Amidst the ferocious exchange, Ahmed and Moustafa were able to dive into the water and swim the final distance to the motorboat. They quickly maneuvered the boat, turning it toward the shore and waiting for the last two men.

Samir took the chance of running the final, lethal steps to the boat while Haji continued firing back, holding off the relentless military advance to buy his comrades time.

The Final Stand

One precise shot finished Haji as Samir was able to successfully dive into the water. He got into the boat and they fled, shunning the futile bullets from the Royal Guards. On the government side, one casualty was reported, and one person was injured.

However, it was not too late for reinforcement. Helicopter gunships hovered above to take up a hot pursuit.

"They are in a pursuit," Samir shouted over the noise of the engine and the approaching choppers.

"Fire at them when they get nearer," Ahmed replied, bracing for a new battle.

"Our ammunition is almost gone," said Moustafa.

"Then, we're not going anywhere," Ahmed replied, the cold truth settling over them.

"Do or die?" Samir asked.

“No choice. We join them to the last drop of our blood,” Ahmed added, accepting the inevitable martyrdom.

“All right, then; let’s do it!” Samir shouted, and the three remaining saboteurs prepared for their final, doomed confrontation.

Morning After: The Scramble

The following day, the true cost of the failed escape was confirmed: the Coast Guard extracted the cadavers of the saboteurs from the water near the port.

Meanwhile, back at the conference center, the leaders were restless for the agonizing waiting period to end. With the scheduled detonation time fast approaching and no bomb yet found, some were already contacting their respective envoys to assist them in abandoning the center altogether.

The high-profile guests moved to preempt any further danger. They proceeded to the helipad and instructed their rescuers to pick them up there. The helipad of the conference center, designed for diplomatic arrivals, was now repurposed and ready for any and all emergency eventualities. The illusion of safety had completely shattered.

The Race to the Rooftop

The crisis reached its peak as the highest-ranking dignitaries abandoned the ground floor. The Emir, Sultan Qaboos of Oman, the President of Gabon, Yemen, Sudan, and others rushed to the rooftop to wait for their rescuers and the helicopter extractions.

President Saddam Hussein, ever cautious, immediately packed up and earlier contacted his pilot, telling him to proceed directly to the roof deck of the center.

“Where to?” Saddam asked his aide as they moved into the hallway.

“At the rooftop, sir,” the aide replied.

Saddam expressed his concern about the vulnerability of the movement. “Do you think we’ll make it to the roof deck safely?” he asked.

“We take the emergency exit to go up. This is just equivalent to a five-story building, and we could get there quickly,” his aide reassured him, focusing on the short, necessary physical effort.

“Okay, quick,” Saddam agreed, and the highly protected party began their rapid ascent to the roof, joining the other leaders in the final, desperate act of self-preservation.

The Detonation

As quickly as they could, Saddam Hussein and his party went against the scampering crowd to join the other heads of state and their delegations in the frantic rush to the rooftop.

Beyond the knowledge of everyone—including the security forces who had focused only on the hotel suites—several time bombs were already planted inside the conference center itself, particularly at the basement level, the rooftop, and strategic areas throughout the structure. The saboteurs had successfully anticipated the evacuation.

And at around eight o’clock in the morning, which marked the fatal twelfth hour, the countdown reached zero.

Great explosions ravaged everything inside the conference center, as immense balls of fire and thick black smoke billowed

up in the skies. The blast ripped through the emergency safe haven. Guests, including the heads of state who had just arrived, were trapped inside and desperately scampered for their lives amidst the ruins. The terrorists' plot had succeeded in causing catastrophic devastation.

Blazing Rubble and Total Chaos

The conference center, when viewed from afar, was engulfed in fire as it instantly blew up into blazing rubble. Total chaos ensued as bombs everywhere began to explode, one after another, confirming the widespread planting of devices. Everyone ran in unspecified directions, their survival instincts overriding all sense of order.

I saw kings, queens, presidents, ministers, and men collapse along the way of falling debris while they desperately fled. My colleagues were instantly lost in the crowd; J. Peterson and Charles disappeared from my sight, and Neil was gone, too.

Because of the overwhelming perplexity, many were desperate and misdirected. The stairs were jammed and crowded with falling men as fiery explosions continued to obliterate everything. A creeping fire fiercely gobbled things along its way inside the center, ensuring that those who weren't killed by the blast would be consumed by the flames. The safe haven had become a raging inferno.

The Rooftop Inferno

Meanwhile, while explosions began to shatter everything below, Saddam Hussein and his men, along with the other dignitaries, had climbed onto the rooftop and alerted their rescuers and military helicopters. However, the top of the building quickly became a death trap. Flames began to billow and reach the rooftop, and the excruciating heat began to scorch fallen and beleaguered men.

Minutes later, one helicopter arrived and extended its harness to Saddam. But as huge, thick smoke began to engulf his men, causing them to fall, a catastrophic second event occurred. Saddam was able to grasp the harness when a big bang engulfed him and swallowed up his helicopter.

Approaching rescue aircraft continued to hover over the rooftop. I saw others, such as President Mubarak, King Fahad, and President Assad, struggle to survive as they desperately attempted to board their helicopters. Unfortunately, another explosion rocked them, and massive billows of smoke swallowed them. They all disappeared in the blaze, marking the terrifying success of the saboteurs' final, coordinated attack on the evacuation zone.

The Scorching Death

I found myself in the hellish aftermath, soaked with blood and trapped in an enclosed bathroom. Driven by sheer desperation, I immediately turned on the faucets to flood the entire room, which was rapidly being engulfed by thick smoke. I plunged and soaked myself in the bathtub of water as the creeping fire gradually weakened the structure around me. From the ceiling to the walls, the dense, choking smoke was suddenly overshadowed by raging fire.

Then, the final, fatal structural collapse began: I saw things begin to fall on me.

“No!! No!!” I screamed in excruciating pain.

I kept shouting, trapped in the tub, as I felt the scorching death consume me.

Waking from the Nightmare

“Paul, wake up! Wake up!” Neil said urgently, gently jiggling my face, trying to revive me from the deep, stressful sleep.

I suddenly opened my eyes and recognized him. I looked around and saw Adam and Willy looking down at me with concern. I lifted myself and sat up slowly. Neil immediately handed me a glass of water.

“What a nightmare,” I sighed, grasping for a steady breath after the terrible vision.

“You had a bad dream?” Neil asked.

“Yes. I thought we were finished. A lengthy nightmare; I thought it was real,” I said, still reeling from the shock of the imagined explosions.

“What was it about? You have too much stress. Fix yourself up, and we will proceed to the mess hall,” Neil advised, urging me toward normalcy.

I couldn't shake the core of the vision. “A bomb scare at the jobsite? Was there a bomb scare?” I asked, needing immediate confirmation that the disaster was just a dream.

“None. Forget about your nightmare. We are already at the peak of our mission here. Our guests have arrived in the center now,” Neil said, confirming the very reality I had just seen shatter.

“I tell you, it was a blazing nightmare. I could hardly believe it,” I insisted.

“You are stressed and have thought too much about the crisis here,” Neil said, dismissing the vivid detail.

I told them all about my bad dreams: the plot, the names, the twelve-hour countdown, and the specter of burning death at the building complex.

They listened and then gently pacified me, telling me that the horrific vision was simply brought on by my stress and anxiety about the appalling crisis already ongoing within the state.

The details of your dream were terrifyingly specific. Does the thought of that dream change how you feel about the current assignment, or the people you are working with?

Chapter 11

The Issue at the Security Point – Mistaken Identity

Friday—the long-awaited, mandatory rest day for every working person in the state, mirroring the age-old tradition across all Islamic nations. It was a day meant to be a deep breath, a time dedicated to the things the workweek stole: spending **unhurried time with family**, tackling those nagging personal activities, the simple luxury of **relaxation**, and the inevitable chore list at home.

For us, however, it was a finely choreographed sequence of necessities. The first order of business was always the **sterile scrubbing of our quarters**, chasing away the grime of the workweek. Then came the mountain of **soiled clothes**, bundled and ready for the weekly trip to the hotel's laundry service—a small, necessary expense. The afternoon was reserved for the emotional lifeline: carefully **writing letters** filled with updates and love for relatives, and then the quiet, poignant joy of finally **reading the letters** that had arrived from them.

The great challenge was transportation. If the **service buses failed to appear**—a frequent, frustrating occurrence—we would immediately hit the roadside, forced to **hitchhike** our way to the nearby park and churches. This journey was crucial. That city park, resting in the shadow of an **old Catholic church** whose bells seemed to ring the only constant time in our lives, was our designated haven. It was a vibrant, chaotic tableau where a multitude of **multinationals**—people from every corner of the globe—would gather. Here, amidst the shade and the murmur of a dozen languages, we could finally exchange **genuine pleasantries**, catch up with friends, find relatives, and

make new acquaintances, grounding ourselves again, if only for a few hours.

Detailed Look at the Global Workforce

In the city, the composition of the crowd was immediately noticeable. The most ubiquitous presence in all Middle Eastern countries was the Indians, followed closely by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Thais, Yemenis, Sudanese, Filipinos, and other Asian nationals. These groups were, and often still are, broadly categorized as hailing from so-called Third World countries.

More often than not, the people we saw were essentially economic refugees. They traveled to this region—and indeed, to most parts of the world—simply because that was where the opportunity to survive was most probable. This was a stark reality that none of us could deny. Their migration was driven by the crushing weight of surging economic and political crises back in their respective homelands. For them, the very hope of survival was directly tied to the availability of a stable job or the slim chance to establish a small business in a more financially secure nation. Their presence here was a testament to the global desperation for opportunity.

The City's Contrasting Havens

The city offered two distinct havens. For consumer needs, the **single, established mini-mall and department stores** were the sole reliable source. Stepping indoors meant finding a curated selection of higher-end goods—the only places one could secure genuinely **better quality pieces of jewelry and dependable electronic items**, setting them apart from the sprawling outdoor markets.

A mere few meters away, the atmosphere changed completely. Tucked behind the solemn facade of the Catholic church was a simple, yet essential, structure: a **concrete and paved gutter**. This was no ordinary drainage; its wide, smooth

top surface had been deliberately engineered for public enjoyment. It served as a long, low bench where people could **relax, sit, and stand**, all while gazing out at the magnificent, rhythmic **waves of the deep blue sea**.

This strip was a place of work and leisure intertwined. Out on the water, you could see the **boatmen**, their small vessels bobbing as they diligently fished for both **small and surprisingly big catches**.

We gravitated to this spot instinctively. We would spend significant time there, soaking in the **cold morning breeze** that carried the scent of salt and the sea. It was a spectacle of human effort: watching the men strain as they hauled in their catches, while others simply shared the quiet intimacy of close friendship. It was, without question, the **best place for personal pleasantries and genuine connection**, a tranquil backdrop against the restless energy of the deep sea.

Heading to the Souk and the Exchange

Just a short distance from the waterfront path was the entry point to the souk, the Arabic term for the traditional market or marketplace. We deliberately kept to the outskirts of this sprawling area, where we could find a diverse array of items available at genuinely minimal prices. A notable percentage of these goods were whispered to be "hot," having been allegedly obtained from the black market and sold cheaply for quick disposal.

Our primary mission, however, lay deeper inside. We pressed on toward the foreign currency exchange center. This was where we completed the most crucial transaction of our day: trading one Kuwaiti Dinar at its current, highly favorable value into our own home currency.

At that time, the Kuwaiti Dinar commanded a staggering value—it held the highest currency exchange rate in the entire

world when stacked against our currency. Because of this phenomenal exchange rate, we would carefully opt to exchange a portion of our saved dinars from our salary. The money wasn't for immediate spending here; it was to ensure we had a substantial amount to enjoy and make good use of when we eventually made it back home. That exchange was, in essence, an investment in our future.

The Purchase and the Critical Deadline

Scattered along the souk's perimeter were numerous small electronic stores. It was in one of these that I finally made a necessary purchase: a mini-transistor radio with an integrated cassette tape recorder. This wasn't a luxury item; it was a tool for survival. I needed it so I could play soothing folk songs—a simple, portable remedy to relieve the suffocating grip of boredom and profound loneliness that defined life back at the camp.

As the afternoon wore on, a different kind of urgency took hold. The return trip was governed by a strict schedule. To get back to the camp, everybody had to be on the designated bus at exactly 4:00 p.m. We were granted a brief, non-negotiable fifteen-minute grace period to allow any stragglers to board.

The penalty for delay was severe and absolute. Failure to arrive at the required time meant one iron-clad consequence: you would have to find your own way back to the camp entirely at your own expense and effort. Missing that 4:15 p.m. cutoff meant an immediate, costly logistical nightmare.

The Missed Deadline and the Ride to Safat

On one occasion, the inevitable happened: we were left behind. We had traveled much farther than intended, venturing deep into the heart of the city. We became thoroughly engrossed by the array of attractive and unique items displayed along the

winding streets of the souk. By the time we checked our watches, the realization hit like a cold shock: there was no way we could make it back to the critical 4:00 p.m. cutoff.

Having missed the camp transport, we immediately began searching for the next viable option. Our only choice was to wait for a public passenger bus heading toward Safat. When one finally arrived, we didn't hesitate. The passenger bus was absolutely fully packed—every seat was taken, and we were forced to join the crowd of riders who were all standing, crammed shoulder-to-shoulder in the aisles. It was a miserable situation, but we had no real alternative. If we let that bus pass, it would take us an unknown, agonizing amount of time to find another one traveling the essential Safat route. We had to take what we could get.

The Last Leg: A Tense Arrival

The Safat bus could only get us so far. It became immediately clear that no passenger buses were permitted along the narrow stretch that led directly to the camp—that road was strictly restricted to light vehicles. We were forced to disembark at the corner of the main thoroughfare, the critical junction that linked us to the distant compound. There, under the fading afternoon light, we had no choice but to wait for a taxi willing to take us the final, expensive distance.

Within a tense span of perhaps five minutes, we finally arrived at the camp gate and quickly made our way toward the mess hall for the evening dinner. It was then, looking out toward a distant service bay, that we spotted Hassan and his team just beginning to board their own transport. He must have seen our late arrival; he glanced across the asphalt and gave us a subtle, knowing acknowledgment—a brief moment of shared understanding of the day's difficulties.

The next morning brought a fresh layer of tension.

Along the now-familiar road to the job site, our bus was suddenly flagged down and ordered to a complete stop. The air immediately grew heavy as armed men in blue camouflage flooded the roadside. They were quickly identified as the Kuwaiti Army. Every passenger braced themselves as the soldiers conducted a thorough, stern inspection. Highway security had become noticeably, chillingly tighter this time. The reason was unstated but universally understood: the recent regional summit meeting had begun, and the security forces were not taking any chances. We were now traveling through a city under a state of high alert.

Escalating Security and the Evening Exodus

The security situation immediately intensified. The hotel gate was now under the command of royal guards, who had imposed a regime of stricter frisking and inspection for everyone entering and exiting the premises. Since the dignitaries—the original guests—had checked in, the entire protocol had fundamentally changed for heightened security reasons. The evening departure was a tightly controlled ritual.

At exactly 6:00 p.m., our shift ended, and we prepared to leave the hotel grounds as the relieving staff took over. In a precise, orderly fashion, we were channeled toward the first bottleneck: a metal detector door, which we quickly nicknamed the "X-ray door." But the checks didn't stop there. Immediately afterward, we were routinely manually frisked, and our personal belongings were thoroughly inspected yet again.

Once through the security cordon, we would wait outside the gate for our transport. If the bus was late, we waited; if it arrived early, the driver would simply hold his position until every seat was completely filled. Once packed, there was no hesitation: the driver would immediately start rolling. Those who missed

the 6:00 p.m. bus were left to wait for a frustrating extra hour for the second transport, which would eventually pick up the remaining workers and take them back to the camp, traveling through the deepening twilight.

The Identity Trap

The evening air was thick and hazy, stained orange by the setting sun, and as always, a long, tired queue snaked toward the hotel gate for the mandatory security check.

As I approached the front, one of the smart, crisp security staff members—a man with an unsettlingly sharp gaze—happened to glance down at my identification card. He didn't just look; he pinned his eyes on me, curiosity tightening his features. When it was finally my turn, he leaned in, his voice dropping into a tone of serious inquiry.

“What's your name, young man?” he asked, his focus absolute.

“Paul Augustino, Sir,” I replied, trying to sound routine.

He didn't move. Instead, he dipped his head slightly to get a clearer, more uncomfortable view of the plastic ID laminated to my chest.

“What was your name again?” he pressed, his curiosity now edged with suspicion.

“Paul Augustino,” I repeated, the word leaving my mouth with distinct reluctance. A strange knot of nerves was forming in my stomach.

His voice suddenly went cold, thick with a deliberate Arabic accent. “You are not Paul Augustino. It says here, you are Fernando Martino.”

I was hit by a wave of disbelief, utterly astonished. His eyes seemed to grow larger, fixing me in a hostile, unblinking stare.

"No, it's me in the photo," I stammered out, my confusion making my voice unsteady.

"Yes," he countered, tapping the card sharply. "But it is not your name that is written in Arabic letters." The implication hung heavy in the hazy air: the card was real, the photo was mine, but the identity itself had been fundamentally compromised.

Detained

"Come, follow me," the guard commanded, his tone now devoid of question and heavy with authority.

He ushered me a few paces away from the busy queue and ordered me to stand still in the corner of the security station while he picked up a phone. I instantly felt a wash of panic and confusion, a chilling sensation that started deep in my core and spread through my entire body. I hadn't realized this simple piece of plastic—this identification card—was about to bring me such a serious problem.

He held my ID in his hand, a tangible piece of evidence against me, and spoke rapidly into the receiver, his voice low and intense.

Meanwhile, the line continued to move. As the frisking and inspection of the other workers proceeded, people I knew streamed past. They spotted me isolated in the corner and tried to communicate through desperate gestures: What's the problem? I couldn't utter a word; my throat was tight with anxiety. All I could manage was a negative shake of the head.

Then, the true gravity of the situation hit: the very bus I was supposed to have boarded—the one carrying my friends and colleagues—pulled away and rolled out of the gate, leaving me completely alone at the security checkpoint. I stood there, stranded, until the inspecting guard finally hung up the phone.

A moment later, a sound drew my attention. A dark army jeep screeched to a halt nearby, and two men in uniform quickly disembarked. One was clearly an officer, identified by his crisp officer's cap and the colorful, shining insignias displayed on his uniform. The other wore the simpler, dark blue camouflage of a standard royal soldier. My heart sank. Whatever was happening, it had just escalated far beyond a simple misprint.

Into the Void

The officer and the guard spoke in low, clipped tones, their conversation lasting only a few chilling moments. Then, the officer simply nodded toward me. "Come with us."

I had no choice but to board the army jeep. The engine roared to life, and we instantly veered away from the brightly lit hotel gate. Instead of heading toward the main road, the jeep tore down a dirt track toward the backyard vicinity of the conference center. The landscape immediately dissolved into something vast and menacing: a stretch of land that was completely bare—the start of the limitless desert.

Inside, I was consumed by a raw, suffocating panic, fighting a losing battle against crushing anxiety.

We plunged directly into the wilderness of the desert. The darkness was overwhelming, quickly swallowing the last fiery remnants of the setting sun that bled out across the limitless horizon. Now, the only guidance came from a few distant, solitary lights—glittering, star-like objects that seemed

impossibly far away. With every yard the jeep covered, tearing deeper into the unknown, I felt the thin line connecting me to civilization, and safety, snap. The ride was terrifyingly smooth, accelerating into the black void. I had no idea where they were taking me, only that I was now entirely at the mercy of two armed men and the vast, silent waste of the night.

Army Headquarters and Interrogation

The army jeep's headlights cut twin beams through the absolute darkness as we continued our terrifying drive. Then, abruptly, within a few minutes, we arrived, stopping just short of the imposing gates of an army headquarters.

We were ordered out and marched into a sterile building. The room we entered could only be described as a computer command center. Piles of complex computer apparatus lined the walls, and I counted at least four, possibly six, uniformed personnel intently operating the machinery.

The officer who brought me spoke briefly with the staff. Then, without explanation, I was instructed to step into a small, isolated glass booth. I waited there, exposed and alone, for what felt like an agonizing hour. The silence amplified my panic.

Finally, the glass door slid open. The officer who had driven me and another uniformed personnel member—a man with a cold, analytical expression—stepped inside, filling the small space.

"Why is your name different from the picture?" the officer demanded, cutting straight to the point.

"I don't know, sir," I pleaded, trying to keep my voice steady. "I just received that ID from the office. I don't know how to read Arabic, that's why I had no idea that it wasn't me."

The other man leaned closer, his eyes sharp. "Didn't you ask the issuer whether or not it was you on the ID?"

"I had no idea that I should have asked them," I explained, the confusion and fear thick in my throat. "I simply trusted and presumed that the card they gave me was truly mine. I believe I am the only one who has this kind of problem, while everyone else's IDs seem correct." The truth was, my trust had led me directly into this glass box.

The Verdict

The first officer pressed the core issue again, his voice sharp and demanding confirmation of my entire existence in Kuwait: "Are you a bona fide hotel staff member of Kuwait Hotels Company in Camp Reggae, Safat, Kuwait?"

Before I could fully answer, the second man, the analytical one, interrupted with a final test of my story: "What was your name again?"

"Paul Augustino," I replied, the name now ringing with a desperate conviction.

"Okay," he stated, his eyes moving toward the computer. "Let me check this from our database to see if you exist as the bona fide staff of the company."

As they turned their attention to the screens, an ice-cold realization hit me: this was the moment of truth. I had to be absolutely organized and strong within myself, because these men held the power to decide against my legitimate claim at any second. I knew the stakes—I had heard the terrifying rumors: the infiltrators they arrested were summarily executed when defiant, and accomplices faced severe imprisonment.

Despite the crushing fear, I forced myself to remain hopeful, calm, and prayerful. I was utterly powerless, offering my fate up to the hands of the database.

A brief, eternity-long while later, they turned back toward the glass booth.

The face of the second man had subtly lightened. The tension in the air fractured.

"You're lucky," he stated plainly. "We found your name in the database of KHC. However, the name on your ID—Fernando Martino—belongs to another person who is also employed as a hotel worker. They mistakenly issued it to you, and yours was the photograph they pasted on it."

A wave of intense, overwhelming relief washed over me. I was giddy with happiness and, in that private moment, I thanked God for having delivered me from such deep, terrifying trouble. I had once again overcome a major crisis in this unforgiving place. The urge to simply give up, to ask them to just send me home, had been powerful just moments ago, but now, survival and hope surged back into me.

The Aftermath and Lingering Doubt

The military personnel drove me directly back to the camp. Before leaving, they proceeded straight to the administrative offices to speak with John Peterson and Charles about the entire identity incident, officially recording the mistake and my unauthorized detour.

With the immediate threat gone, I went to the mess hall and quietly took my dinner. Soon, Neil and his company, along with several other colleagues, converged on my table, their faces alight with curiosity and concern. They pressed me for details

about what had happened at the gate and why the army had taken me.

But even as I recounted the terrifying events, a deep, unsettling feeling began to take root. I simply could not understand the injustice of the situation. Why was I the one burdened by the entire, harrowing search process, detained by the military, and forced to prove my existence, while the other guy—the one who mistakenly received my actual identity card—was not? He was out there, completely oblivious, walking around with my name and likely facing no scrutiny at all.

I was profoundly emotionally affected. The sheer distress of being mistaken for an infiltrator or a security risk, even for a few hours, had begun to haunt me. The relief of being cleared was quickly being replaced by the exhausting weight of fear and the persistent, nagging feeling of being unfairly targeted.

The Dark Revelation

Despite the lingering emotional storm, my colleagues gathered around, their urgency palpable. They consoled me, but more importantly, they urged me to be strong and man enough to absorb the shock and be prepared should such a terrifying challenge ever arise again.

Yet, as I sat there, trying to process the logic-defying circumstances—the misplaced name, the correct photo, the military escort—my mind, now chillingly crystal clear, flashed back to a recent, disturbing nightmare.

In that nightmare, a similar scenario had unfolded, but with a terrifying twist: I recalled seeing Hassan and his company actively conspiring. The nightmare suggested they were manipulating identity cards to make some kind of clandestine mission possible.

The chilling connection—Hassan's knowing nod when he saw me detained, the perfectly mismatched ID—slammed into me. I struggled to reconcile the friendly face of my colleague with the dark suspicion rising in my gut. I could hardly believe it, yet the pieces fit. The "mistake" with my ID was suddenly looking less like a clerical error and much more like a deliberate, calculated action designed to facilitate a plan I was now terrifyingly close to exposing.

The Transformation

I continued to dwell on the chilling memory of the nightmare, which had so precisely foreshadowed the crisis I had just endured. Yet, the ordeal was not merely a horror to be overcome; it was instrumental in profoundly changing my entire attitude toward life. It was a stark, brutal lesson that forced me to be firm, resolute, and man enough to face any challenge that lay along the way.

I had been tested and I had survived. Because I did it, I felt a surge of genuine stimulation, awakening a sense of self I hadn't known I possessed. I felt like a real man, and perhaps, if fate demanded it, I could even die like a real man, too.

This entire terrifying sequence brought me to a critical realization: the world was made up of many faces of struggle and hardship. It was the reality of working in a world populated entirely by strangers, a place where, often, one felt they did not truly belong, but where survival demanded absolute self-reliance.

Chapter 12

Countdown to a Summit Conference

Day 1: The Shock of Reality

The truth hit me like a physical blow. I was utterly shocked, never in my life believing that the haunting scene from my nightmare would manifest into reality. I learned the definitive schedule: my personal guest was none other than President Saddam Hussein. Neil's responsibility was King Fahad. Adam was assigned President Hosni Mubarak, and Willy had President Hafez Assad.

I was struck utterly speechless.

When Saddam Hussein finally arrived, he was engulfed by his full entourage—a menacing wall of battle-gear army men. The sight was so intimidating that I couldn't utter a single greeting, and I certainly didn't extend my hand to shake his. Instead, I was instantly forced to step away from the door as his haunted-looking, heavily armed escorts brutally swept their way into the room.

Despite the chaos and the rapid deployment of security, I managed to hold my ground just long enough to see his face. As the motorcade sneaked the dictator into his quarters, I caught a clear, undeniable glimpse of his features from a distance. The nightmare was officially over, replaced by a dangerous, high-stakes reality.

Detailed Preparations and Guest Monitoring

The tension in the hotel accommodation was almost physically palpable. Despite the surface appearance of a "typical and

tranquil" day, we knew the situation was anything but normal; it was a pressurized calm before an anticipated storm.

Our duties had narrowed into a relentless focus on monitoring every single step and every passing hour. We were required to track the smallest movements of every visitor—both the known dignitaries and the shadows—coming into and out of the massive edifice. The psychological strain came from the inability to distinguish between the truly legitimate visitors and those strange-looking people who might already be intruders. This enforced ambiguity meant we had to maintain a state of absolute, draining caution and vigilance.

Neil and I took on the critical responsibility of sweeping the area. Our rounds were constant, checking specifically for any suspicious movements or unfamiliar faces that might be lingering. No corner was ignored. We meticulously inspected the long expanse of the dining room, ensuring its readiness, and then moved to the luxurious, comfortable bedrooms. Every corner of the unit had to be checked and cleared to guarantee the entire area was unequivocally safe from any potential threat.

Meanwhile, the support staff operated under similar pressure. Abdullah and his Egyptian assistant were cloistered in the kitchen, intensely focused on preparing the complex, high-stakes meals required by the guests. Our work was in anticipation of theirs: we prepared the immaculate living rooms and bedrooms, knowing that once the meal service was complete, the powerful men would retreat, seeking a moment of much-needed rest or sleep. Their period of vulnerability was our moment of highest alert.

The Suspicious Exchange

I felt a crippling combination of doubt and overwhelming curiosity, a direct hangover from the terrifying realization

prompted by my nightmare. I couldn't shake the connection to Hassan, and because Abdullah was his close associate, I found myself glancing at Abdullah's movements once in a while, tracking his focus and his hands. Despite the internal alarm bells, I maintained a perfectly civil and professional attitude toward him and his assistant.

"Busy day, right?" I asked, forcing a casual tone as I approached the kitchen threshold.

Abdullah paused, wiping his hands on a towel. "Oh, yes. Aren't you?" he returned, his eyes meeting mine briefly.

"Well, of course, I am," I replied, leaning slightly against the frame. "However, everything for me is well done. I presume that I might be disturbing your final preparations."

"No. It's okay," he assured me, a slightly weary smile touching his lips. "Everything is almost done. We're just waiting for the right time."

"What right time?" I pressed, the question escaping me with an unmistakable hint of doubt.

"The time when they need to be served," he stated simply, gesturing toward the prepared trays.

I decided to test his composure, injecting a loaded question into the mundane setting. "How much longer are we going to wait, seven to twelve hours?" I insinuated, pushing the absurd timeline out there.

He was clearly surprised. His pleasant expression vanished as he stopped what he was doing and looked straight into my eyes, searching for a sign. "What, seven hours to twelve hours?"

Are you hungry, or are you only joking?" he asked, a sharp edge of confusion in his voice.

"Ah, yes, I was only joking with you," I quickly corrected, hoping to smooth over my deliberate probe.

He relaxed slightly, returning to his task. "In a few minutes, they're coming for their meals, so you'd better take your meal now because you won't find any time for eating when they come."

"Perhaps later. I am still full," I lied, knowing I couldn't risk leaving my post yet.

"Okay, just care for some if you feel so," he replied with a kind, dismissive wave, turning his attention back to the plates. But for me, the brief, intense moment of his surprise had only fueled my suspicion.

The Weight of Paranoia

The lingering effects of the crisis were traumatic. I genuinely felt paranoid, bordering on crazy, every time I conducted those required security checks. Each inspection was a confrontation with fear—the dread that the nightmare scenario, the one involving manipulation and conspiracy, was about to become a horrifying reality.

This internal battle brought severe tension and reluctance to my work. It was agonizing to carry out my duties, knowing I had to constantly mingle with the very people who were central figures in my horrendous dream. They were colleagues, yet I saw them through a veil of suspicion.

Despite the crushing psychological burden, I focused fiercely on two things: I had to simultaneously heal myself from the

recent ordeal and force myself to be myself—to act with the professionalism and composure expected, even while my mind screamed warnings. It was a constant, exhausting effort to keep the terror hidden beneath a mask of competence.

Secret Meals and The Escape

We developed a subtle, necessary strategy for self-care. In some instances, when the pressure became too great, we would test new menus without the guests' knowledge or consent. This meant quickly slipping through the kitchen, grabbing some of the better meals that had been prepared, and setting them aside. We would then bring these good meals back home to the camp, a small, quiet feast meant to ease our anxiety and temporary worries.

Our true haven, however, was found in movement—specifically, in the moment we boarded the bus that would drive us out of the suffocating vicinity of the hotel and the conference center.

Once inside, we finally felt a rush of worry-free time. We desperately needed to breathe freely and were only able to do so when the bus started to roll away. We threw open the windows to catch the fresh, cold air of the desert, a stark, healthy contrast to the stale, tense environment we were leaving behind. Watching the heavily threatened and critical area of those edifices recede into the distance was the only true measure of escape we had.

The Uneasy Rest

When we finally made it home, the sense of security was intoxicating. We collapsed, immediately feeling the immense relief of lying flat in the bed, desperate to enjoy a deep sleep and prepare for another day's struggle. The exhaustion was so profound that we often forgot to take our meal at the mess hall

during the usual dinner hours. Instead, we would wake up late in the night, fueled by hunger, to take the meal that had been prepared for the second, later batch of workers returning from the job site.

But even this sanctuary was fragile.

Reports of sporadic intrusions near the border were escalating rapidly. This immediately triggered a heavy reaction from the Kuwait Army, who began firing warning shots at the trespassers. The intruders, however, retaliated heavily with a series of sustained gun battles, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides. In response to this grave threat, massive military reinforcements were deployed. The goal was absolute: to completely seal the border, extending the defensive line all the way to the critical coastal areas of the Kuwait Bay. We were resting mere miles from a rapidly intensifying war zone.

The Bullet and the Calm

We were consumed by anxiety. It was the second day of the summit, and our awareness of the critical, escalating situation at the border was paramount. Yet, inside the heavily guarded center and hotel, the entire atmosphere was eerily calm and peaceful. We observed nothing unusual or suspicious among the security details. The heavily armed men of Saddam Hussein, along with the security aides of the other heads of state, were precisely where they should be: silently stationed in their respective suites.

It was in the middle of the night, while we were engaged in a quiet conversation, that the unnerving silence was violently shattered: a single, sharp gunshot was fired.

Instantly, the hotel's core security staff was alerted and rushed toward the presumed origin of the salvo. But the response from the diplomatic security teams was terrifyingly subdued. The security aides of the various delegations were not troubled at

all. Instead, they remained rigidly indoors. They made absolutely no moves that might alarm or call the attention of the neighboring suites, suggesting a preternatural calm—or perhaps, an appalling knowledge of what had just occurred.

The Investigation: An Accidental Salvo

We quickly established that the security forces assigned specifically to the hotel held jurisdiction over any commotion or problem that arose on the premises. Their immediate response proved effective: the security personnel were able to trace the precise origin of the gunshot. The sound had exuded from the ground level of the hotel, where one of the security aides—a member of a visiting delegation stationed in a suite—had accidentally pulled the trigger of his service pistol while meticulously polishing it.

He was immediately apprehended and taken for an interview by the hotel security personnel. It was apparent that the incident occurred in the suite where Adam was assigned—the quarters occupied by President Hafez Assad.

We rushed down to the secured area to check the scene.

"What happened?" I asked Adam, my voice tight with relief mixed with lingering tension.

"It was sudden," Adam exclaimed, still visibly shaken. "I was terrified when the shot came out right near the door. I was just standing at the corner when I heard it fire!"

"Was President Assad inside?" I continued, already moving past the fear toward the security implications.

"Yes, he went out for a moment, but his aide immediately told him to get back inside his room for security reasons," Adam added.

"Is Hassan there?" I asked, the question slipping out, driven by my paranoia and the memory of the nightmare.

"He wasn't here when it happened. He went to Charles's office," Adam replied. "The security aide was also startled when he accidentally touched the trigger."

"I was worried too when we heard the salvo," I admitted. "I thought something serious was going on down here."

"Don't worry, everything is okay now," Adam assured me.

I decided to press my luck, leaning in and lowering my voice. "Is Hassan doing well?" I hissed. The question was a loaded probe.

Adam looked at me, a flash of annoyance or confusion crossing his face. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You know, no suspicious movement?" I clarified, trying to keep my tone light but pointed.

He offered a slight, knowing smile. "I told you, don't bother yourself. Forget about your nightmare," he replied, dismissing my paranoia.

"No problem," I remarked, letting the matter drop. "I was just making sure that it does not happen in reality." The immediate danger had passed, but my suspicion that the "mistake" was part of a larger, darker reality remained firmly intact.

Resolution and Lingering Distrust

The situation was quickly defused. The security aide, identified as a Syrian national, offered a profuse apology for the disturbance. Since the shot was ruled an accident and no one was harmed, everything was amicably settled, and the brief state of high alert was called off.

We returned to our respective positions, but my internal alarm remained blaring. I became acutely perceptive about the movements of the head butler, Abdullah, and his assistant. The paranoia—the terrifying memory of the nightmare where they played a disastrous role—was controlling my vigilance.

Whenever I passed in and out of the dining room to serve food and drinks to Saddam's heavily armed escorts, my eyes unconsciously tracked them. I didn't know if Abdullah had been offended by my watchful conduct—the way I scrutinized his every turn—but I couldn't stop. Yet, during the entire duration of my duty, despite my intense, anxious surveillance, I honestly found no concrete suspicious movements from either of them. The fear was real, but the evidence was missing.

Mike's Invitation

In the morning, as I walked alone back from the mess hall, Mike deliberately intercepted me. He approached with a calculated casualness, falling into step beside me.

"Your turn starts at two o'clock, right?" he asked.

"Yes, why?" I replied, instantly wary of any deviation from the routine.

"Will you come with me for a while to my quarters?" he asked, placing a hand on my left shoulder—a gesture that felt less friendly and more possessive.

When we reached his room, he immediately moved to his refrigerator and, to my astonishment, took out a canned beer, offering one to me.

"Is this not prohibited in this area? Where did you even get this?" I asked, genuinely shocked, knowing the strict local laws.

"No. It is prohibited only when you're caught seriously," he dismissed, taking a swig. "My friend from the Carlton Hotel gave me some during a special occasion." He quickly shifted the subject. "By the way, you're from Manila, right?"

"Yes," I confirmed.

"I am from Manila, too," he continued, leaning in slightly. "How about seeing you somewhere there when we return home?"

"Why?" I asked, my defenses going up. His sudden friendliness and the illegal beer felt like a prelude to something I didn't want to be a part of.

Here is a detailed rewrite of Mike's job offer and the narrator's guarded reaction, emphasizing the lure of the offer versus the suspicion it generates:

The Casino Proposition

Mike didn't wait for me to press the issue. He took another sip of his beer and continued, his voice smooth and persuasive. "Definitely, we will all be jobless when we return home, and everyone is going to seek a new job, right?" His question framed the situation as a mutual crisis only he was solving.

"Are you proposing something?" I asked, cutting to the chase. The free beer and the sudden confidentiality were now making sense.

"You may want to join and work with me in a three-star hotel," he said, listing the perks immediately. "The salary is good, and you will enjoy the free meal and incentives." He let that sink in before delivering the catch: "However, we'd be working in a casino, as card dealers, in the evening."

The job was clearly lucrative, but it was a completely different world. "That's too kind and generous of you, but I don't know anything about the job," I admitted.

"Don't worry," he assured me, waving his hand dismissively. "We'll provide the proper training."

I threw him a test, trying to gauge the sincerity and reach of his offer. "Do you want me to offer this opportunity to my friends in our quarter?"

His answer was immediate and direct, increasing my suspicion tenfold. "No, it's only for you because the slot is only good for one, and I prefer to give it to you, because you're a good and reliable man," he persisted, laying on the flattery.

I needed time and space to think through the implications of this exclusive offer. "I will think it over because I am still planning to go back abroad," I said, giving myself an out.

Mike remained genial, his confidence unshaken. "Well, it's just an offer you may take, or leave. Should you decide, my quarter's door is always open for you, before we go back home," he said, emphasizing the looming deadline.

"Thank you," I replied, ending the exchange with a professional nod, but already dissecting the conversation in my mind. The offer was a tempting safety net, but Mike's strange secrecy and high praise for my 'reliability' made the casino job feel less like

an opportunity and more like a potentially compromised position.

Here is a detailed rewrite of the conversation with Neil and the others about Mike's job offer, focusing on the conflicting advice and the sudden surge of suspicion:

Conflicting Advice and a Warning

I brought Mike's friendly but strange job offer to Neil and the company immediately, needing their opinion on the casino proposition.

Neil was pragmatic. "We'll support you if you think the offer is solid. Why not take the chance, anyway? There's no harm in trying. Who knows, it might lead you to a better job."

Adam was equally encouraging, focusing on the legitimacy of the work. "Yes, why not try it? After all, there really are legitimate gambling casinos in many hotels back home."

Then, Willy interjected, his voice sharp with suspicion, throwing cold water on the idea. "Mike must be having another plan—one that might be bad, or good, for you." He paused for dramatic effect. "Remember, Bonquito is your most potential suspect in your recent predicament. He is your silent enemy. He's an offended guy, and he might want you to take his bitter lesson."

"Yes, I know, but whatever his evil plans are, they won't happen," I countered, outwardly defiant but feeling a familiar chill. "I am ready to defend myself and fight back, if possible. Anyway, my mind and heart are still set on working abroad. I will think it over."

Willy pressed the point, leaning in. "But be careful with Bonquito. He's an ally of Mike's, and they could easily conspire

to bring you down. I would suggest you try to know them both very well before you proceed with anything."

The association snapped into focus. "Huh? You're right," I replied, a wave of genuine surprise hitting me. The tempting job offer, Mike's strange secrecy, and the potential link to my known enemy, Bonquito, suddenly made the entire proposition feel like a dangerous, well-laid trap.

The Shady Alliance

The conversation with Willy served as the final, brutal confirmation I needed. I was sharply reminded that Mike already carried a shady record—a fact I had conveniently forgotten in the face of his friendly approach and the tempting job offer. That settled my mind completely: I had to be wiser than to walk straight into such an obvious trap. This wasn't a good-faith offer; Mike was clearly thinking, or actively planning, something that involved me.

Our next step was the one wise move that revealed everything. We quietly conducted a background check on both Mike and Bonquito. The results were chilling: Bonquito had an equally dark, documented record. More disturbingly, we discovered that Mike, his supposed "friend," had been the active accomplice to Bonquito during their illicit activities back home. The puzzle pieces locked into place: the "mistaken" ID, Bonquito's silent hatred, Mike's exclusive job offer, and the illegal beer were all threads in the same dangerous web. This was not a coincidence; it was a targeted conspiracy.

Chapter 13

The Superpowers Prepare for War

Day 2: The Intrepid Incursion

The fragile calm shattered yet again. Once more, the situation along the Kuwait-Iraq border intensified—this time, far more gravely. Intruders, displaying chilling audacity, dared an intrepid incursion, meeting the border guards with immediate and heavy fire. The resulting gun battles were not quick skirmishes; they were sustained, brutal exchanges.

The cost was immediately apparent: casualties were reported on the part of the government forces, confirming the seriousness of the attack. Likewise, the intruders sustained heavy casualties, turning the border area into a violent, bloody battleground.

But the most terrifying news filtered in through official channels: Intelligence reports confirmed that some intruders were successful. A number of these elements had managed to breach the defensive lines and were now loose within the state. A frantic, state-wide manhunt was underway.

In direct response, a palpable layer of tight security was reinforced across all government establishments. The focus of this desperate clampdown was the conference center itself. The security detail became a hard, unforgiving wall, desperate to seal the area off from these now-internal unscrupulous elements whose intentions—and exact whereabouts—were unknown. Every shadow now felt like a hiding place; every unfamiliar face, a potential threat.

Desensitization and Global Intervention

By this point, our response was a chilling form of normalcy: we were alerted, as usual, but the escalating threat no longer felt extraordinary. We had become psychologically desensitized to the looming possibility of war in the state. The crucial factor was that we had mentally prepared for any eventuality, a state of mind that kept absolute terror at bay; the danger could no longer scare us at all.

However, the rapid escalation of the border clashes was far too serious to be ignored by the international community. The violence instantly drew the urgent attention of world powers. Major players, including the United States, the U.K., and other allied countries, perceived the conflict as an immediate threat to global stability. This consensus quickly prompted a massive U.S. military maneuver in the Gulf, transforming the local crisis into a potentially global confrontation. The area surrounding us was not just a border dispute anymore; it was now the flashpoint for intervention by the world's greatest armies.

White House: The Global Tripwire

At the White House in Washington, D.C., the U.S. President was locked in a state of high alert, his gaze fixed on the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Gulf. With a stroke of a pen, he unleashed the U.S. Navy SEALs, ordering them to aggressively patrol and secure peace and order in the region's most critical areas.

The Pentagon was a twenty-four-hour nerve center, reporting every development—every shift in military activity on land, air, and water—directly back to the White House. High above the conflict, sophisticated technology, primarily satellite networks, scanned the terrain, poised to instantly indicate and confirm

any hostile military action the adversary might launch against neighboring states.

When tension flared in the Gulf, the U.S. and the rest of the world weren't merely watching; they were bracing. The consequences of conflict between these nations were critical, holding the global economy hostage. This was acutely felt by developing, third-world countries whose very survival depended on the uninterrupted flow of oil from these wealthy states. The rising price of crude oil was the first, terrifying symptom. As the Gulf crisis worsened, the stock market was guaranteed to plummet, signaling an impending financial catastrophe that would ripple across the globe.

Global Powers Mobilize

The world's self-appointed police for global peace and security—specifically the **United States, the U.K., France, and the G8 nations**—were maintaining an intense watch over the Gulf. Their response was immediate and overwhelming: massive **aircraft carriers** and the formidable **U.S. Seventh Fleet** were ordered to sail and maneuver directly into the **Persian Gulf**. Their mandate was twofold: to aggressively **secure peace** and, more pragmatically, to fiercely **protect their national interests** in the region.

The U.S. and its allies were playing a **crucial, high-stakes role** in the ongoing Middle East crisis, with the escalating tension between **Iraq and Kuwait** dominating current world affairs. Both the U.S. and the U.K. were militarily **supportive of their allies** in the region, prepared to intervene whenever hostile enemies waged war against them.

This intervention had a deep historical precedent. It was widely acknowledged that the U.S. and its allies had been involved in **numerous conflicts** across the Middle East and other global hotspots in past crises. The grim reality was undeniable: if full-

scale war were to break out now, **many innocent lives would be in grave danger.**

On this particular day, the **Persian Gulf was locked in a critical crisis**, monitored by a growing alliance of forces. This **coalition**—including the U.S., U.K., Kuwait, and various other allies—was unified, mobilized, and ready for confrontation.

Escalation to War Footing

The rapidly deteriorating situation directly prompted U.S. President **George H.W. Bush** to take decisive military action. He immediately ordered the deployment of two colossal symbols of American power, the **USS Dwight D. Eisenhower** and the **USS Abraham Lincoln**, to the Persian Gulf. Their mission was clear: to stand ready for **any eventuality**.

The **White House and Pentagon officials** were consumed, working around the clock, entirely focused on the crisis in the Persian Gulf. Military officers and senior personnel were on pins and needles, their focus locked on the President. They were anxiously **waiting for his pronouncements**—the final orders involving concrete military action in the designated regions of the Middle East and the Gulf.

The nation's top military brass was playing a **crucial, high-stakes role**. The **U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff**, led by **General Colin Powell**, along with **Defense Secretary Dick Cheney** and other high-ranking officials in the White House, worked in an intense, unified front, hand-in-hand with the President to manage the escalating situation. Every decision made in those rooms was a potential trigger for war.

Command in the Field and the Coalition Buildup

On the ground, General Norman Schwarzkopf, the designated commander of the US forces in the Middle East, was rapidly deployed to Saudi Arabia to assume full command of the

growing armed forces. His task was immediate and immense: he had to work tirelessly with other high-ranking officers in the field, coordinating every tactical detail with Defense Secretary Dick Cheney back in Washington. Their focus was absolute—tracking the current movements of enemy troops and assessing the volatile situation in the entire Middle East, with a specific, intense concentration on Saudi Arabia and its neighboring Arab countries.

The decisions made at the highest levels quickly translated into massive action. The President and General Schwarzkopf jointly agreed to aggressively build up and reinforce their military presence across critical regions of Saudi Arabia. Concurrently, the coalition forces—a formidable alliance consisting of the US, UK, Kuwait, and other allies—began an unprecedented level of cooperation. They prepared their combined military forces, augmenting their presence and ensuring every contingency was covered in the event of the worst-case scenario: a full-scale regional war.

Naval Power Converges in the Persian Gulf

The waters of the Persian Gulf became the staging ground for immediate, massive intervention. The two colossal aircraft carriers of the United States—the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and the USS Independence (correcting the name from the previous mention of Abraham Lincoln)—arrived promptly, executing the direct order issued by President George H.W. Bush. The Pentagon now had all eyes locked on the day-to-day, minute-by-minute developments in the region.

The decks of the carriers immediately began launching a visible show of force: fighter jets and the latest sophisticated weapons started their maneuvers across the area. The air was thick with the roar of engines as drills commenced.

Crucially, the personnel involved in these military operations reflected the global reach of the U.S. Navy. Asian sailors, particularly Filipinos who had joined the Navy, were integrated into the operation. They were part of the military exercises designed to effectively master the complex tactical situation. These forces were actively conducting assault operations in the Gulf itself, while simultaneous reinforcements were pushed into other critical regions of the Middle East to ensure complete military control.

The Kuwait-Iraq No-Fly Zone: Intercept

War had not officially begun between Kuwait and Iraq, yet the region was already fertile ground for daring survival and heroic tales in a nascent war zone. While ground forces guarded the borderland against enemy intrusion, another, equally critical battle was unfolding in the sky: the protectors were now monitoring the airspace.

The coalition aircraft's sophisticated high-tech radar equipment suddenly blared to life. It began receiving and transmitting crucial data signals from unknown aircraft flying illegally within the newly established Kuwait-Iraq No-Fly Zone. This blatant violation immediately prompted the aircraft commander to issue a critical order: deploy a squadron of six FA-15 fighter jets to neutralize the Kuwaiti sky zone.

The response was instantaneous. A squadron of six lethal fighter jets rushed to the no-fly zone. Colonel Saunders, the veteran leader of the squadron, did not hesitate, pushing his FA-15s to their maximum speed to scream toward the violation area.

When they finally tore into the zone, the sight was confirmed: four Iraqi fighter jets were slowly maneuvering just above the cloudy ceiling of Kuwaiti airspace, their presence a direct and hostile challenge. The aerial confrontation was seconds away.

Evasion and Positioning

Colonel Saunders immediately issued a tactical order to his pilots: they were to fly below the enemy, hiding themselves deep within the thick cloud cover to avoid being noticed by the renowned Iraqi "Ace" pilots. While maintaining concealment, Saunders swiftly transmitted confirmed intelligence regarding the positioning of the Iraqi "birds" maneuvering in the sky zone.

The Colonel himself led the maneuver, flying low and staying perfectly concealed by the clouds. This deliberate, stealthy approach ensured that by the time the squadron suddenly reappeared—bursting out of the cloud cover in front and center of the Iraqi jets—they would already be positioned on a parallel, aggressive intercept vector. The element of surprise was the only thing that could guarantee a safe engagement.

The Intercept

With the precision of swooping eagles, the six FA-15s burst from the cloud cover. Their appearance was designed for maximum shock: they adroitly maneuvered and immediately came up parallel to the four Iraqi intruders, appearing so closely that the enemy flyers could see the American pilots inside their cockpits.

"Hello, guys. Have you gotten any business in this zone?" Colonel Saunders' voice crackled over the shared radio frequency, cutting through the tense silence.

The Iraqi pilots were clearly astonished. They rapidly glanced at the new arrivals, quickly identifying them by the distinctive stars and rays painted on the wings of the American fighter jets.

The Iraqi pilots seemed to signal a language barrier, forcing Saunders to repeat the crucial announcement. "Hello, can you hear me? Any business in the no-fly zone?"

The pilot who seemed to be the leader—a figure with a distinct mustache visible through his helmet—did not respond verbally, simply offering a slight, dismissive nod as his only acknowledgment.

Saunders' voice sharpened, leaving no room for misunderstanding. "Away from this no-fly zone!" he ordered.

But the Iraqi jets remained in position, their engines holding steady. They did not listen.

The Standoff and Retreat

With the warning ignored, **Colonel Saunders** executed his next, more aggressive maneuver: he ordered his squadron to **dive down and disappear** into the thick cloud cover once more.

The four adamant Iraqi pilots were visibly searching the sky, looking for the fighter jets that had suddenly vanished. They continued stubbornly on their original course, apparently determined to press the challenge.

But this time, Saunders planned a decisive move. He and his squadron reappeared in a shocking, strategic reversal: they materialized **directly in the opposite direction** and positioned themselves squarely in front of the intruders. The FA-15s were locked, loaded, and **ready to fire at any moment** if the Iraqi pilots insisted on taking another yard on their path.

"Do you want to engage?" Colonel Saunders transmitted, the single question a chilling, final warning.

The pilot-leader, the man with the mustache, was clearly hesitant. Seeing the American jets positioned for a strike and hearing the clear threat, his defiance crumbled. "**No**," he finally transmitted.

Then, as quickly as their planes would allow, the four Iraqi jets **dove down and flew back home**, their mission abandoned.

Colonel Saunders kept the pressure on, chasing them just far enough to ensure they had definitively left the **No-Fly Zone**. "They backed off!" he exclaimed over the comms, relief and adrenaline surging through his voice.

Soon after, the squadron broke formation and flew back to the home base aircraft carrier.

Meanwhile, the two naval giants, the **USS Dwight D. Eisenhower** and the **USS Independence**, continued their powerful maneuvering around the Gulf, a formidable presence in a region where the tension remained **high and frighteningly unpredictable**.

Chapter 14

Day 3: The Countdown Begins

The day before the final day of the summit, my anxiety reached a fever pitch. My deep-seated paranoia struck me with crippling force. I was overwhelmingly anxious and physically restless, consumed by the need to confront the horrifying catastrophe I had witnessed in my nightmare. In that dream, the conference center was the target of a desperate search for ticking time bombs—devices planted somewhere in the edifices that, if not found and stopped, would blow up everything.

I grabbed Neil, my voice shaking with urgency. "We should be vigilant, Neil! A countdown to twelve hours has just begun. Tomorrow morning, at around seven o'clock, is the final hour that will destroy everything on the job site, just as it happened in my nightmare!" I exclaimed.

Neil recoiled, his face etched with genuine concern and alarm. "You're becoming crazy and paranoid again," he shot back, his tone a mix of disbelief and pity. "You're traumatized by your nightmare. Forget about it. It will not happen; it was just a bad dream. Honestly, I'm scared that you need a doctor already."

The Trauma of the Twelfth Hour

Arguing the Premonition

"No, I am not! My mind is perfectly clear," I insisted, my voice tight with desperation. "I'm worried because similar events *have* come to reality, and you know it. The identity mix-up, the security alerts—all of it! Don't you see that those incidents in my nightmare have something to do with a **premonition**?"

Neil remained stubbornly rational, trying to pull me back to earth. "It simply doesn't follow that the ultimate incident would also happen in reality—especially the disastrous explosion of bombs," he argued, his voice firm. "It's not real, and it will not happen because **nobody would dare do something like that here**. Those selective events from your nightmare that you believe came true are just **coincidental**, brought about by your subconscious mind processing the stress of the job. **It's impossible.**"

The Final Plea for Vigilance

"I am just speculating," I conceded, trying to sound less frantic, "but nobody really knows if those confirmed intruders have sneaked into the job site and done it all. They're still out there."

"Mere speculation doesn't make things happen; it's just a prediction," Neil insisted, trying to anchor himself and me to logic. "You need to think positive."

"Nobody knows what lies ahead," I countered, my voice hardening with resolve. "But we have to make sure we are aware of the possibility of that horrible disaster."

"I understand you, Paul, I really do, but you have to keep calm and stop worrying," Neil said, his tone softening with empathy.

"I will only be settled and restored when nothing happens after the summit meeting," I stated firmly. The next day was the only deadline that mattered.

"Come what may," Neil replied, the phrase heavy with resignation.

Despite his initial dismissal, I had succeeded in persuading him to at least be alert to what would take place, given that the

following day was the last of the summit. As we returned to our posts, I took on the solitary burden of the alleged countdown, keeping a relentless count and monitoring the hours that were transpiring while we were on duty. The clock was ticking.

The Night Watch and Abdullah's Assurance

The entire floor was unnervingly **silent**, the quiet only broken by the heavy breathing of the security detail. The aides of Saddam and his armed men had finally succumbed to exhaustion, sprawled asleep in the living room after a late-night **drinking spree and merriment**.

I seized the opportunity and walked out of the suite, desperate to talk to Neil. The tension from the supposed countdown was unbearable, and I needed an ally.

Suddenly, **Abdullah appeared** in my path, materializing quietly from the direction of the service area. "Aren't you feeling tired?" he asked, his question sounding more like a probe.

"No, I don't feel like resting," I replied vaguely, the truth of my emotional state confusing even to me. "I'm just tired."

"Where are you going?" he continued, fixing me with an unnaturally steady gaze.

"To Neil's suite. I just want to talk to him for a while and relax. Is Ahmed there?" I asked, diverting the focus.

"Yes. Ahmed just came from the camp," he confirmed.

"Okay, perhaps Neil has seen him coming then."

The atmosphere shifted again as Abdullah leaned in, his voice softening with feigned concern. "**How do you feel about the threat of war here?**" he asked.

"Of course, I'm always worried and afraid of what might happen. Why aren't you worried?" I returned, challenging his composure.

He offered a quick, strained smile, but despite the gesture, a flicker of genuine **fear was apparent on his face**. "A little, but I always expect that it would not happen now because the leaders of conflicting nations are here," he insisted, the logic

sounding practiced. "They will not attack since their leader is here. **How could they invade and wage war?**" He finished with a forceful attempt at reassurance: "Don't be anxious, be strong; I **assure you nothing will happen** until we all leave this place." Here is a detailed rewrite of the conversation with Abdullah, focusing on the geopolitical context and the narrator's internal conflict:

Geopolitics and Personal Terror

"We are just strangers in this land," I reasoned, trying to appeal to his cultural knowledge. "You know them more than we do because you're an Arab. You know your own culture and behavior. But tell me, why do these saboteurs always want to slip over the border? What is their end goal that causes such chaos and terror to people?"

Abdullah's demeanor shifted from casual to geopolitical analyst. "Saddam really wants to take Kuwait because of the immense wealth of this state, which he brazenly claims as part of Iraq," he explained. "Beyond that, Iraq is in dire financial distress and is heavily indebted to Kuwait and other surrounding allies."

"You mean, Saddam won't stop until he gets Kuwait?" I asked, stating the terrifying implication plainly.

"Yes. He has been striving and exerting effort to cross the border many times," he confirmed. "As you know, many attempts of intrusion have always been made by his men to cause clashes on the border."

He delivered his final assessment with a chilling certainty. "There will always be chaos and tension in this region as long as Saddam has not achieved his goal. He is very powerful, and his armed forces are militarily trained and experienced for war.

History will tell you of the devastating Iran-Iraq war. What Saddam wants, Saddam gets. It's just a matter of time."

He then attempted to offer comfort based on his analysis. "So, don't you worry; feel at home, and relax," he urged me.

Beyond his knowledge, however, his entire geopolitical argument missed the mark on my true source of distress. It was not the issue in the region that made me particularly restless and anxious. It was the terrifying, personal thought of the passing time until the twelfth hour—the precise moment of the explosion from my dream—that had been utterly bothering me. I was, apparently, still suffering from the intense trauma of the nightmare.

The Servant's Servant

Under the Gaze of the Guards

The armed men of Saddam Hussein were enjoying a loud, relaxed moment, consuming their food and non-alcoholic beverages while I continued my anxious routine of serving their continuous needs. I was trying desperately to be evasive, tense and fearful of doing anything that might agitate them. Their sheer presence was unnerving. I couldn't help but notice that some of them looked haggard, their eyes alarmingly reddened, which made me suspect they had just returned from a brutal field mission.

A first man broke the silence, calling out to me in broken English. "Hey, Sadik, are you Filipino?"

"Yes, sir," I replied in a deliberately low voice.

"You have a Muslim friend here?" he added.

"Yes, I have some," I confirmed.

"Do you like Muslims?" asked a second man, leaning back with a challenging look.

"Yes, I like them. Muslims are good friends," I said, offering the diplomatic answer required by the circumstances.

"Do you have a girl?" he continued, shifting to personal territory.

"I have a wife back home," I replied.

"How many?" the first one pressed, his tone predatory.

"Only one," I stated simply.

"Why only one? Add some more," he urged with a smirk.

"That's not allowed in our customs," I replied, standing my ground gently.

"Then, why not convert to Muslim?" he added, pushing the boundary.

"No. It's okay with me to be a Christian. I am content," I maintained.

"You will not be happy if you have only one wife," the second one insisted, shaking his head.

"It's okay for me. I am happy," I repeated, firm in my personal defense.

"Oh, maybe you have more than one in secret," he speculated, his eyes darting to his comrades.

"None," I confirmed, trying to close the topic.

"Come on, I know some of you out there have several wives and children," he continued, dismissing my denial.

The first man finished the conversation with a crude joke, a laugh rumbling in his chest. "Or you only have one because you are like that? Ha-ha-ha," he mused, the implication hanging in the air. I simply endured the insult, forced to stand in my subservient role under the dangerous scrutiny of the men.

Jests, Relief, and Renewed Suspicion

The armed men erupted in laughter, fueled by the first man who demonstrated the meaning of his crude joke with crude hand gestures.

"Anyway, Sadik, we are just joking with you. You may go," the first man finally conceded, waving me off.

"It's okay. No problem," I said, offering a neutral reply as I quickly walked away, eager to escape their predatory scrutiny.

The closing ceremony was finally observed. The heads of state began returning to their respective suites for their final preparations. However, my sense of complacency was not absolute. Even though the guests and their entourages were still around, a vast relief washed over me: the dreaded twelve hours had fully elapsed. My feeling was finally good, and my sanity was resuscitated as the apocalyptic timing of my nightmare had failed to materialize.

It was then that Abdullah approached me, offering a reprieve. "Saddam and his men were all fed and are resting now. Take this chance for your meal, Paul," he said.

"Yes. Sure, thank you. The food looks succulent," I replied, genuinely appreciative of the moment of peace.

He peered at me, his gaze now focused. "I have observed that you looked so restless. Are you having any problems?" he asked.

"Ah, no—nothing," I lied quickly, the paranoia still keeping me guarded. "Perhaps, I was just tensed and stressed with the environment out there."

"Relax, Paul. Don't be too anxious about everything around you. That won't benefit you. C'mon, eat all you can. They will leave in a few hours," he added.

"Really? Oh, thank you," I hissed, a surge of relief mixed with suspicion at his absolute certainty.

"See, you're so negative," he observed. "You can now exhale when they all leave," he said, sounding like a handler concluding a difficult job.

At the designated time, the guests eventually began their preparations to leave.

Just as I was about to relax fully, Abdullah returned with a strange, final command. "Paul, come nearer to Saddam's aide, and he will give you something," he said, gesturing toward the suite.

"What is he giving?" I asked, instantly wary. Why me?

"Just go, and he will give you something before they leave," he insisted, pushing me toward the high-security area for a final, unexpected encounter.

The Gift and the Ominous Hourglass

I cautiously approached **Saddam's close aide**, acutely aware of the eyes of the armed men watching my every move.

"One for you, and a bill," the aide said curtly, handing me a small, heavy **wristwatch and a dinar bill**.

"Thank you very much," I said, clutching the objects tightly. I was instantly fascinated by the watch: its face bore the distinctive, embossed portrait of **Saddam Hussein**.

Other servants who followed me out received the same "compliment" as they cleared the suite. Down at the entrance of the ground floor, the atmosphere was chaotic yet elegant. Dignitaries were being ushered into their **shiny, elegant, and bulletproof limousines** for the final trip to the airport. **Flashes of glaring lights** from the cameras of the media personnel continued to glow, capturing the guests waving their final goodbyes to the crowd as they boarded their powerful cars.

Meanwhile, a more immediate curiosity consumed us: Saddam's peculiar and fascinating gift.

"Did you get one for you?" I asked Neil, showing him my watch.

"Yes. This is **unique** among the compliments the guests gave," Neil said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Most of the guests gave dollars and dinars only, but no other personal tokens," he replied.

I gave a bitter, forced laugh. "See, I told you, Saddam is good, right? He-he," I mused.

"Yes, I know, but I believe it's **not over yet**," I said, the doubt in my voice immediately surfacing.

"But why? What is it?" Neil asked, sensing the shift in my mood.

"This means something. If the outcome of the summit meeting is not good, then this token is a message—a grave sign for the state and its citizenry," I replied. "Yes, this looks like a token, but it feels like an **hourglass**."

"What do you mean? Do you discern something?" Neil pressed, his eyes widening.

"I am not a visionary, but I can sense an **ominous event** when the result of this summit meeting is not satisfactory," I speculated, the idea solidifying in my mind. "This token is an **hourglass of the invasion of Kuwait.**"

"But how could you say that? You must be a visionary!" Neil exclaimed, genuinely shocked.

"By the hour itself. The watch means time—**time to wait** for that critical event. No, I was just speculating, but I have a chilling feeling that an event *will* occur in this region, though perhaps not immediately," I added, the relief of the failed nightmare now replaced by a deeper, more calculated dread. The gift felt like a countdown clock set by the dictator himself.

Chapter 15

The Eerie Calm After the Summit

The most crucial occasion of the year for the state was finally over. An immediate, profound silence fell over the entire complex. The job sites became as quiet as an empty mess room. Hallways, promenades, and the conference center were all left in tranquility after the boisterous noise of the crowd had finally passed.

Now, the only sound to be heard was the pervasive whispering wind, which felt overwhelming in the vast, open desert land. Its presence was only broken when it hit the fortified, concrete edifices of the complex. The once-blinding spectacle was gone: the intense glaring lights and the constant flashing of media cameras had ceased. Even the sky reflected the mood; thick, dark clouds filtered the normally radiant rays of the sun. The elegant, shiny limousines were long gone, having delivered their high-profile guests to their respective destinations.

With the departure of the dignitaries, a massive internal operation began. Everything needed to be fixed, cleaned, and restored to its former, pristine condition for preservation.

Crucially, the external threat seemed to have dissipated with the guests. The rigorous security in all corners of the complex, and even at the critical gates of restriction, became immediately at rest and lax for the meantime. The heavily alerted military men, who had been stationed outside the gates with their sophisticated weapons and luxury cars, had all departed to escort the last of the guests to the airport.

The Scramble for Leftovers and the Return

With the dignitaries gone, a different kind of frenzy took over. Fellow hotel workers immediately began feasting on the

leftovers that remained in the kitchens and dining rooms of the now-vacant suites. Beyond the immediate meal, there was a bounty of imported canned goods and fine utensils that needed to be boxed up and returned to the storerooms. However, the temporary lapse in security encouraged a few desperate and nasty boys to secretly loot some of the goods, concealing the items quickly in their bags.

We continued our work under the same routine and schedule until every task was finished. As we finally prepared to leave, many of us—including myself—exited with bags of the imported canned goods, which were surreptitiously concealed inside our belongings. This act of petty pilfering went completely unnoticed by the security personnel, who were now relaxed and lenient for the meantime, more interested in leisurely promenading through the vicinity of the complex than in performing detailed inspections.

The normal schedule was instantly reinstated. The same reliable bus schedule was appointed to make the final personal deliveries, driving us from the emptied job sites and back home to the camp. We carried with us the literal and metaphorical spoils of the summit.

The Chase and the Raid

When **Charles**—the administrator—learned that some opportunistic workers had stolen canned goods and valuable kitchen utensils, he reacted swiftly and decisively. He immediately ordered the security personnel to **pursue the bus** that had just left, racing to catch the culprits before they could disappear into the camp.

However, the bus had a crucial head start and arrived at the camp just **ahead of the pursuing security staff**. A quick-thinking dispatcher must have alerted the **camp security** to intercept the bus and its passengers. But as the bus doors

opened, the hotel workers managed to **step out freely and quickly**. Their escape turned into a panicked rush when the approaching security staff blew their whistles, the shrill blasts clearly indicating for them to stop.

The moment our fellow workers realized they were the targets—figuring out they were about to be apprehended—they began to **disperse and run in different directions** just to evade capture. It was a chaotic free-for-all.

Unfortunately for some, they **did not make it to their quarters** and were swiftly apprehended, then brought directly to **John Peterson's office for investigation**. Others, however, were successful, managing to reach the relative safety of their rooms just seconds before the security staff could catch them. The camp was plunged into a sudden state of frantic disorder.

The End of the Crisis and the Final Wait

With the summit finally concluded and the high-stakes guests gone, a collective sigh of relief swept through the entire staff. **Everybody became at ease and genuinely happy**, feeling a deep satisfaction at having survived and successfully overcome the most critical scenario of serving the Islamic Conference. The immediate threat, both real and imagined, had passed. However, the job wasn't over yet. We still had to undertake our routine tasks for the **last remaining two weeks** on the job site. This final stretch was defined by a different kind of waiting: we were meticulously watching the calendar, counting the days until our names would finally be called. We were simply biding our time, patiently waiting for our individual turns to be **booked on a flight back home**. The tension was gone, replaced by the quiet, eager anticipation of departure.

The Final Refusal

I was busy with my final chores in the suite when **Mike**, accompanied by a silent friend named **Whitey**, approached me. The atmosphere immediately tightened.

"Have you made up your mind regarding the job I offered you?" Mike asked, getting straight to the point.

"I did, and thank you, but **no**," I replied without hesitation.

He immediately turned up the pressure. "It's a good job that you can hardly find elsewhere. It will take you some time to land a job back home, so **grab it now**," he insisted.

"No. Sorry, Mike, I have other plans. Why don't you just offer it to your friends, or somebody else here?" I suggested, trying to redirect the opportunity.

"But I believe that you're the **right man** for that job," he persisted, his gaze intense.

Sensing the true nature of his persistent desire, I decided to expose his superficial compliments. "Why? What qualifications does that job require of a person?" I challenged.

"You have the **personality, the looks**. I don't doubt your ability and talent," he replied, focusing on my appearance rather than my skills.

"Then you might be looking for an escort, not a decent employee," I **insinuated**, hitting him with the accusation I suspected was true.

He put his hand on my shoulder, an attempt at intimidation, but I instantly **pulled away, quite quickly**.

"You're insulting me, friend. Don't be arrogant and rude. I'm not fooling around," he said, his smile gone.

"It's because you're so annoying. **Please, I told you I'm not interested**," I reiterated, my voice sharp with frustration.

"You will lose this great chance, Paul," he warned.

"There might be other great opportunities out there in store for me," I said, firm in my decision. "Anyway, I can still wait for that opportunity. Thank you."

He finally accepted defeat, though not graciously. "All right. I can't force you if you don't, but next time, **learn to be discreet in your words and respect others**. You're like a sword," he **lambasted**, his voice laced with thinly veiled threat.

As he turned to leave with Whitey, I was jarred by his words. I realized that my refusal had made me seem **ill-mannered and arrogant**. I opened my mouth, intending to apologize or explain, but then I quickly stopped myself. I was silent, held back by the fear of getting scolded in other, more dangerous ways by him and his now-confirmed ally, Bonquito.

The Price of Defiance

Neil approached me immediately, his expression serious. "**Be careful, Mike is a difficult man.** I believe that you have seriously offended him with your attitude, and he won't forget it," he warned.

"Yes, I know that I have shattered his good expectations of me," I admitted, feeling genuinely contrite about the harshness of my refusal. "I feel sorry about that."

I turned to him, seeking guidance on how to navigate the fallout. "**What do you think I should do now?**" I asked.

"I think you owe him an apology," Neil stated simply.

"It might be too late," I lamented. "I have not only offended him but also implied more conflict with him by refusing his offer so strongly." The connection to Bonquito only amplified the danger of my actions.

Neil looked directly at me, his final piece of advice cold and pragmatic. "**Just apologize so you may avoid any indirect revenge.**" He understood that in this environment, a mere slight could escalate into a malicious act, and swallowing my pride was the only way to safeguard myself.

The Shunning and the Lingering Threat

The following day, acting on Neil's advice, I resolved to apologize and approached **Mike** in the vicinity of the job site. But the moment I came into view, the consequences of my refusal became starkly clear. Before I could even get near, **one of his men obstructed me**, stepping directly into my path, while Mike and his friend quickly moved away. I felt profoundly

and intentionally **shunned**, as if an unknown person had been assigned to prevent me from approaching him entirely. I didn't find another chance to meet him since then, and worries began to **mount up inside me**.

Neil saw my frustration and offered his final, crucial piece of advice. "**Because of that situation, he has harbored ill feelings toward you**," Neil warned. "All you have to do now is **be careful, wherever you are**. Be vigilant with those men whom you think might impede your way, or might make your life difficult." He finished with a note of encouragement: "However, do not fear, but be strong in all your undertakings." "Thank you for your advice; I will do that," I replied, accepting the reality of the danger.

Neil's gaze remained serious. "**I have the feeling that he's a sword**. He now has a personal interest in you," he said, using my own earlier phrasing to convey Mike's calculated threat.

I quickly refocused the danger away from the source and onto the wider threat. "**Forget about Mike**," I said. "**But the real threat is his allies, who might do something harmful against me**." I understood that Mike would use his connections—namely Bonquito—to enact his revenge indirectly.

The Silent Threat

From that moment on, the situation with Mike's associates became a persistent, low-grade threat. Whenever I came across **Whitey and a couple of his friends**, I noticed they deliberately **stared daggers at me**. It was a silent, intense form of aggression, unmistakably signifying their **antipathy** and the grudge I had earned by defying Mike.

I tried to act as though I **didn't mind their ill-will**, refusing to acknowledge their manufactured conflict. However, beneath my calm exterior, I genuinely felt **threatened**. I worried constantly that they might choose to **lay their hands on me**, knowing that in that environment, their allies would likely

protect them. The confrontation had transitioned from a verbal rejection to a menacing, physical possibility.

The Quiet Monotony and the Final Days

As **batches of co-workers**, particularly those in our neighboring quarters, began their staggered departure for home, a distinct sense of **loneliness** descended upon us. The camp surroundings, which had once vibrated with the signs of collective life, were now gradually becoming overwhelmed by the **monotony of silence**. Each departing bus left an empty space, amplifying our desire to be next.

In the meantime, we focused on our last duty: ensuring the job site was **spick and span**. This final, meticulous cleaning eventually marked the **official end of our commitment** to the summit project.

With the work done and only the wait remaining, a wave of palpable relief swept through the team. Everyone was **happy and excited** to simply be enjoying the few remaining, good days left at the camp before finally boarding the flight back home.

Last Days: The Warning on Kuwait Bay

With our commitment finished, the four of us seized our remaining days for a welcome period of camaraderie. We found time to visit the **church**, enjoy leisurely **dining**, and shop for items to bring back home. Our favorite pastime was a leisurely walk along the **sandy coast** of the deep blue waters of the **Kuwait Bay**, enjoying the sights and the boardwalks.

It was during one such outing that fate intervened. **Coincidentally**, we spotted **Mike and his company** among the throng of people walking around. The air instantly soured. I noticed Mike **staring directly at me**, while his associate, **Whitey**, amplified the threat by making an aggressive gesture: showing a **tightly clenched fist**. Neil and I both saw them but made a conscious effort to ignore them.

As we subtly changed direction to avoid a confrontation, one of their men quickly approached us. He didn't speak loudly, but instead **whispered a sharp warning** as he passed: "**Be careful.**" He then quickly turned back, giving me one final, sharp glance.

"What's wrong with you? What do you want?" I demanded, anger surging through me, ready to challenge their intimidation.

"No, ignore them," **Neil said urgently**, grabbing my arm and pulling me along.

"If you let yourself be provoked by them, you'll suffer the consequences," **Willy insisted**. "They only want trouble."

"Forget about them, Paul. Anyway, our days are numbered, and we'll be back home soon," **Adam urged**, his voice carrying a serious weight. "Get in trouble now, and you might not go back home at all."

Later, while we spent time shopping in the souk, the encounter with Mike and the mounting suspicion of his allies refused to leave my mind. I needed an anchor, a piece of truth outside this environment. I thought of **Yusuf**, a friendly Kuwaiti baker we had met near the camp. I pulled out my wallet and retrieved his **business card**. He was my only connection to understanding the local reality beyond the lies and threats of my co-workers.

Finding Yusuf: A Glimmer of Hope

"**Yes, he is somewhere here with his business. Let's find him,**" I said, convinced that Yusuf was the key to gaining some genuine local insight and perhaps a new opportunity.

"Do you really think he is still doing business here?" Neil asked, skeptical after our long separation from the camp vicinity.

"I believe so," I replied.

It didn't take us long to locate his shop. We found his **bakeshop** exactly as listed on the business card, marked by a glass-walled, printed sign: **YUSUF. BAKESHOP.**

Yusuf instantly recognized us. "**Yes, I remember you, the guys I met along the road, right?**" he affirmed, his face breaking into a welcoming smile.

"Exactly. We happened to drop by, hoping that you're still doing business here," I said.

"Anything I can do to help?" Yusuf asked warmly.

I immediately laid out our situation. "As you know, the summit meeting is over. Our stay here is almost limited to a week now. I would like to **seek a new job anywhere, in any capacity**, where I may be of service."

"How about your colleagues? Aren't they interested in finding a new job?" he inquired.

"Of course, if there is an available job for me, why not? Adam and Willy have not decided yet," Neil chimed in.

"Yes, if ever we get interested and decide to work, we will just contact them," Willy confirmed.

"All right, I understand. But I will have to first talk to my **business colleagues** to see if they have any manpower requirements," Yusuf said, sounding genuine.

"How soon until we hear from you?" I asked, anxious about the dwindling time we had left.

"As soon as possible. In the meantime, let me know where I can contact you so we can deal even when you have left for home," he added, preparing for our departure.

"We will be glad and **very grateful to you, Yusuf**, if you can make our request possible," I said, feeling a surge of hope.

"I will do that so I can help in your job search," he replied.

Shortly after, we left Yusuf with his promise of help. We were now filled with a renewed sense of purpose and a fervent desire to return to the city **as soon as possible** for a potential job.

We drove back through the wide avenues, determined to enjoy our last moments in the city. We found other interesting places we hadn't seen before, encountering glamorous **Kuwaiti ladies**, whom we presumed were students; they waved at us and smiled when they caught our attention along the way. We

even visited the popular family destination, **Kuwait's version of Disney Land**, soaking up the atmosphere of a normal, carefree life we hoped to return to soon.

Last Moments of Freedom

Like typical visitors finally granted a break, we fully immersed ourselves in the amusement park. We enjoyed the thrills of **riding the roller coaster**, laughing off the stress of the past weeks. Coincidentally, we met other groups of **fellow hotel workers** who had also seized the opportunity to visit the park. This prompted us to take numerous **souvenir photos** at all the ideally selected, picturesque views.

To cap off the trip, we visited the city's unique **revolving restaurant**. There, high above the streets, we enjoyed the most memorable part of our day, viewing the entire **perspective of the city at high altitude** as it transitioned from dusk to night.

It was almost dark when we finally arrived back at the camp, filled with a sense of **complacency and appreciation** for our trip. We were so thoroughly exhausted and satisfied that we didn't even care to stop by the mess hall to dine. Instead, we went directly to our quarters to find a well-deserved rest.

The Final Clearing and a Shocking Confession

Like the preceding batches of co-workers, it was finally our turn to report to the office of **J. Peterson and P. Charles** to surrender our items and clear ourselves of any accountability. This process would result in the issuance of our crucial clearance papers, followed by the retrieval of our **passport, plane ticket, and other pertinent travel documents** that would allow us to board the state's flag carrier back home.

"Three sets of overall uniforms, a pair of leather shoes, three sets of socks, and lastly your identification card," an **Arab clerk** began, reading off the inventory list with a tired rote.

"All is accounted for here, except my ID," I stated.

"Why?" he asked, not looking up.

"It was not properly issued because **it's fake**," I replied, deliberately using a charged word.

"What fake?" he snapped, finally looking up.

"It was not my ID. It does not bear my name, but it has my photo," I continued, holding the infamous card.

"Where is it? Show it to me."

I presented the card. "Here. Read its Arabic letters and see if it's my real name," I challenged.

"What's your name?" he asked, reluctantly.

"Paul Augustino. You know my whole tale, right?" I pressed.

"Right. Paul Augustino. What's your problem?" he asked in a high-pitched voice, trying to regain control of the exchange.

"My problem is your negligence, and the ordeal it brought me," I countered, letting the full weight of my resentment show. **"I hope you're also reminded of your guilt.** What is your name, Sadik?"

"Mohammad," he replied.

"Then, you must be good. **Your name is good, but your person is dark,**" I accused him point-blank.

He paused for a tense moment, his irritation boiling over as he looked straight into my eyes. Likewise, my own **sharp eyes continued to stare** at him, refusing to yield. It was a silent battle of wills, and he finally broke. He seemed to realize the severity of his mistake and immediately **humbled his attitude.**

"Ah, yes, it's done and in the past, so sorry for that," he apologized, the words strained.

"Sadik," I leaned in, keeping my voice low. **"This is just between you and me.** Anyway, it's over. I just want to know who really screwed me."

"What do you mean? I allowed your countrymen to intervene, to put things here in a mess?" he defensively replied, his mind clearly racing.

"My question is brief and simple. If you answer me correctly, I will go in peace. **I am not seeking any further trouble.**"

"I understand you." He paused, looking into my eyes again, making a decision.

"Yes, it was **Bonquito and Mike**, who told me that they were looking for his men's IDs."

"I did not know that they had a problem with you," he added quickly, trying to distance himself.

"But don't you know that they were not supposed to touch anything, like any documents inside the office? **They were not allowed!** That's against the management policy, and you're guilty of that offense! **Are they your friends?**"

"Yes, but I trusted Mike because he is a supervisor."

"That's not the point here. You're not supposed to be working in the office when you are a **lawbreaker! You don't follow rules!**" I didn't care about his excuses; I had the names.

"I am sorry, Sadik, I didn't know about that issue of yours," he pleaded, finally accepting the blame. I had what I came for: the confirmation of the shadowy alliance and the truth behind my ID nightmare.

The Reckoning

I delivered my final, scathing verdict, my voice ringing with the authority born of truth and survival. "**Had I known it earlier, you must not have been in your position now!** It's all over. **You are an idiot!** It's time you went back home!" I exclaimed, my anger tempered by the profound satisfaction of having exposed the truth.

Defeated and humiliated, he silently **lowered his head**. Without another word, he quickly signed my clearance documents, validating my departure. With a sense of **complacency and victory**, I turned and stepped out of the office. The ordeal was finally, definitively over.

Chapter 16

Daddy's Home

Final Glimpses and Departure

As a gesture of compassion and to honor the memory of the struggles that had been a profound part of our lives, we decided to take one last look at the camp. We **trod the avenues** one last time, taking a **final glimpse** at the significant areas and capturing each one on the **lenses of our cameras**.

The camp now radiated an unsettling peace. The **tranquility of the abandoned quarters** was overwhelming. The only movement was the **whistling blow of strong winds** tossing dry leaves and withered flowers onto the grassy ground. The sight of the rustic gardens, the remaining bushes, trees, and the chirping birds was all that remained of what was once a busy convergence point for **multi-ethnic people** with their contrasting cultures, beliefs, and ideologies.

Once again, as I left the perimeter of the camp, I glanced at the **towering minaret**. Coincidentally, the powerful, loud prayer of the **Imam echoed** across the surrounding proximity: "**Allahhh! Akbar!**"

The Final Confrontation

While standing in the long queue at the airport terminal to clear our travel documents, my heart lurched. I happened to see **Mike, Bonquito, and Whitey** across the narrow, one-line gap separating our queues. I knew they had seen us already, and **Whitey**—Mike's eager ally—kept his eyes seriously and fixedly on me.

I met his gaze, **firmly staring at him** without flinching.

Perceiving that my demeanor was **behaviorally adamant** and unwilling to be intimidated, Whitey finally broke the stare. He diverted his attention to Mike and Bonquito, and they immediately **uttered amongst themselves**, clearly plotting or passing judgment.

The atmosphere inside the aircraft was full of **excitement and gladness** for the eagerly returning workers. Like the first plane chartered by the hotel, this one was also exclusively for the personnel, meaning we would be sharing the flight with our enemies. We boarded the same aircraft but made sure to secure seats **distantly apart** from their group.

Just as I was settling in, a fellow co-worker approached my seat. "**Paul, this is a piece of the message from somebody. I was just told to give this to you,**" he said, handing me a small, folded note. The final, silent game was not yet over.

The Call to Challenge

"**What is this?**" I asked the messenger, staring at the folded note in my hand.

I immediately went over to Neil, who was seated just two rows away from me. We discreetly made our way to the washroom, the only place where a confidential conversation was possible.

Opening the note, I read the scrawled message, feeling a cold surge of adrenaline. "**Mike, Bonquito, and Whitey want a confrontation upon landing at the airport,**" I revealed.

"These people are really troublesome," Neil hissed, his eyes blazing. "We can confront them **right at the airport**, to show we're not afraid of them. Besides, we'll be in our **homeland**, where we can deal fairly with authorities in the event of trouble."

I quickly scribbled a reply on the note, a defiant acceptance of their challenge, and asked the messenger to return it to their section of the plane.

The Enemy's Decision

Moments later, Mike, Bonquito, and Whitey were huddled together over my response.

"It's a call to our challenge," Mike stated, his voice low and dangerous.

"What do you think?" Whitey hissed nervously.

"How many are there?" Mike asked, focusing on the tactical disadvantage.

"I only saw Paul and Neil, but the other two [Adam and Willy] are not with them. Perhaps they're in the next batch," Whitey replied, peering down the cabin.

"In the same way that we are only three," Mike affirmed, realizing the numbers were smaller than expected.

"We have no support, at all, in case of trouble. Our allies are not with us," Whitey cautioned, clearly hesitant.

"At least, it's an **equal match. Call?**" Mike pushed, requiring a unanimous decision.

"Call," Whitey reluctantly agreed.

"Call," Bonquito confirmed, his resentment for me overriding his caution.

Preparing the Counter-Strike

Back in my seat, the rush of the challenge still thrummed in my veins.

"What do you think? How many are there?" I asked Neil, double-checking the intelligence we had.

"I believe there are only three. I don't see any familiar faces that are allied to them," Neil replied, confirming the lineup. "We are six."

"A fair match, isn't it?" I asked, a sense of grim satisfaction settling over me.

"Yes, fair enough, as we are six against three," Neil replied, confirming our numerical advantage. The odds were now securely in our favor for the confrontation that awaited us on the tarmac.

The Non-Confrontation and Final Farewell

The instant we **touched down at the airport**, we proceeded immediately to the clearing window, our tension high as we kept a vigilant eye out for our enemies. However, the lobby was a chaos of homecoming; the throng of people swarming the area was so dense that we couldn't even determine their presence in the long queue.

"Have you noticed them?" I asked Neil, straining my neck to look.

"No, there are too many people," Neil replied, frustration evident in his voice.

"Anyway, let's wait until we clear our documents," I suggested, knowing we couldn't risk trouble until we were officially on home soil.

We were successfully cleared at the window and quickly secured our baggage from the conveyor belt, but not a **shadow of the three**—Mike, Bonquito, and Whitey—could be seen. We moved out into the lobby, searching among the multitude, but

there was **no showing by them**. All around us, our excitedly happy colleagues were being met with cheers and hugs from their waiting relatives.

Then, in a distant, less crowded area, we finally spotted three figures who resembled them. They were hurrying out the door and quickly flagged down a taxicab. The realization hit us both instantly: they hadn't backed down; they were **scared away by their own fright**.

"What does that mean?" I asked, a mix of anticlimax and relief settling over me.

"It's a **bluff**, hehe," Neil chuckled, shaking his head at their cowardice.

The immediate tension gone, our thoughts turned to home. "Do you have somebody to fetch you?" I asked Neil.

"No. I advised them not to bother me, for I will just surprise them," he said, smiling. "How about you?"

"Not at all," I replied.

"So what are we waiting for?" he asked. The confrontation was a bust, and we were free. "Just get in touch with me when the baker replies." He was referencing Yusuf and the promise of a job.

"Definitely. **Count on me**. Until we meet again," I said firmly, shaking his hand. We had survived the ordeal abroad and thwarted the final confrontation at home. Now, the future was our own to rebuild.

The Ominous Warning and the Move to Bahrain

Within a year of our return, the lingering desire for work abroad pushed me to act. I sent an inquiry letter to **Yusuf** about

his status and the job he had promised. His reply came a week later, but it brought news that was both alarming and confirming of the regional instability. He disclosed his immediate intention to leave the state, planning to **immigrate to the U.K.** because of the **growing tension and the high probability of the outbreak of war.** He strongly advised that it would be wise and safe not to seek a job in the region at the moment, cautioning against the risk of a future invasion.

I profoundly considered his **ominous assessment** of the ongoing crisis, which burdened me with indecisive doubt about going elsewhere in the Gulf. However, I pushed past the fear and pursued my interest in employment in **Bahrain**, rationalizing that it was sufficiently far from the primary disputed areas. I had lost contact with my former colleagues like **Adam, Willy, and Neil**; my last communication was almost a year prior, and subsequent calls revealed they had moved to the province for business.

Dismissing the warnings, I traveled to Bahrain, wearing the commemorative, fanciful **wristwatch of Saddam** around my wrist.

My first few months in Bahrain were characterized by a sense of **calm and confidence.** Although issues of the Gulf crisis were still on heightened alert, the immediate impact was lesser, and the threat was hardly a thought in our area.

However, as we settled into the peace and focused on our jobs, that complacency was violently shattered. We were suddenly **appalled one morning by the news** of a **serious, imminent threat of Kuwait's invasion** that might occur at an unspecified time, associated with the ongoing, volatile developments in the region. The crisis had followed me.

The Clock Strikes Zero: Invasion

The chilling news delivered an undeniable truth: Yusuf was right. It had been profoundly unwise to return to the region, and now, the crisis had fully materialized into a catastrophic risk.

My gaze fell immediately to the souvenir wristwatch still fastened around my wrist. The crisis had not only developed, it had ripened into war. I finally understood the ominous significance of the timepiece. The watch, with Saddam's embossed portrait on its face, was not merely a compliment; it was a potent, implied message—a deadly countdown to a final showdown.

The nightmare had taken three agonizing years to catch up, but this time, the terrible event had come to reality. The wait was over. The whispers of war had become a roar: The invasion had begun.

Chapter 17

August 2, 1990: The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait

The early hours of August 2, 1990, were shattered by the deep, metallic snarls of war. An estimated 600 tanks and more than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers initiated an intrepid, full-scale invasion into the sovereign soil of Kuwait. This massive conquest came despite clear, unambiguous warnings from global powers, including the U.S. and Egypt, as well as explicit demands from the U.N. and other Arab countries to halt the aggression—all of which Iraq flagrantly spurned.

City Under Siege

Consequently, a heavy gun battle erupted around Kuwait City, a conflict in which an estimated 200 people were tragically killed. The entire capital was instantly besieged, and utter turmoil created havoc for all its trapped inhabitants. Bewildered by the sudden, brutal attack, citizens desperately fled to any available safe refuge to escape the onslaught of Saddam and his army. Some were unfortunate victims of the chaos, while others narrowly escaped death by fleeing across the harsh desert toward the border of Saudi Arabia.

The Hammer-Blow Assault

Upon entry, Kuwait City was relentlessly pounded by heavy bombardment. The saber-rattling Iraqi forces caught the Kuwaiti defense forces completely unaware. The invasion began with Iraqi commandos infiltrating the Kuwaiti border first, launching their initial strike at midnight.

The main attack followed a coordinated, two-pronged strategy:

The First Attack Force drove relentlessly south, barreling straight toward Kuwait City down the main highway.

The Second Force diverted farther west before cutting back to the east, effectively severing the city and cutting it off from the entire southern direction of the state.

Here is a detailed and action-packed account of the defense of Kuwait City:

The Desperate Defense of Kuwait

In a swift and organized response to the initial assault, the 35th Armored Brigade of the Kuwaiti Army was deployed by its battalion commander to repel the Iraqi attack near Al Jahra, west of Kuwait City. Concurrently, fighter jets of the Kuwaiti Air Force scrambled to intercept the invading Iraqi Air Force. Unfortunately, the air encounter was devastating; Kuwait sustained a major blow, losing almost 20% of its fighter jets.

Air Battles Over the City

Despite the losses, the fighting continued fiercely. Iraqi helicopter airborne forces engaged in an intense air battle over the city. While the Iraqi elite troops were being dropped into the urban environment, their ground forces were met with determined resistance, sustaining heavy losses as they were repelled by the entrenched Kuwaiti defenders.

Assault on the Capital

Iraq intensified its primary objective—the seizure of Kuwait City—by deploying commandos via both helicopters and boats from the sea. This two-pronged infiltration circumvented the ground defenses while Iraqi battalions besieged the nation's airports and airbases.

The most symbolic and tragic attack was the assault on Dasman Palace, the Royal Residence of the Emir. The palace was fiercely defended by the Emir's Royal Guard. During the siege, the younger brother of the Emir, Fahad Al-Ahmed Al Jaber Al-Sabah, was killed while defending the palace, a profound loss that underscored the brutality of the invasion.

The Collapse of the Capital

The final, brutal phase of the conquest saw **Iraqi jets firing on targets in the capital** as special forces rapidly landed at the Defense Office. They then scoured the **Emir's palace**, only to find the Emir had successfully fled to Saudi Arabia with some of his ministers.

The city descended into anarchy. Roads were systematically **blockaded**, and massive **looting occurred** in shops across the city. Iraqi soldiers fired **indiscriminately** at resisting men caught in the crossfire. All possible **communication lines were instantly severed** with Kuwait, trapping thousands of people—particularly **foreign nationals**—who suddenly found themselves isolated in the besieged city.

Personal Alarm

When I heard the dreadful news from Bahrain, a wave of cold panic struck. I quickly contacted **Neil** at his house, but no one answered. My anxiety soared for our friends: **Mina, Lorie**, and our former camp colleague, **Bulah**, who was now known to be working at the Marriott Hotel in Kuwait City. I felt helpless, unable to do anything but obsessively maintain my awareness of the developing catastrophe in the Gulf.

Missiles Over the Gulf

Even as Kuwait City fell, the international response was mobilizing. While the fierce ground fighting was taking place, **coalition forces unleashed Tomahawk missiles** from the

Gulf. These were met with immediate retaliation, intercepted in the skies by the **Scud missiles of Iraq**.

Tragically, one of these skirmishes had direct, terrifying consequences for us. A **strayed missile was misdirected** and slammed into the seas near Bahrain. Though it didn't hit land, the explosion caused instant **trauma and fear** for its inhabitants and the many foreign nationals, serving as a brutal reminder that even our supposed safe haven was now dangerously close to the heart of the war zone.

The Panic in Bahrain and the Last Flight Out

We waited, paralyzed by fear, watching the sea where the missile had struck. The initial thought was that the **Scud missiles** might have accidentally lost their direction and could hit our area next. Immediately, **foreign nationals** began to gather at the **Bahrain International Airport**, desperate to secure seats on the last remaining flights of the day. **Tension became higher** with every passing minute; most of us were **panicky and gripped with fear and worries**.

Our immediate response was to seek **emergency leave** from our employers. Despite the strenuous **objections and persuasions of our Arab employers**—who insisted that no amount of war threat would materialize in our area—we were adamant. We insisted that our worried **loved ones were urging us to leave**, concerned about our safety, and that we would request to return once the situation had completely calmed down. Under pressure, our **passports and tickets**, which we subsidized, were issued to us.

We had a frantic, narrow window of almost **three days** to process our documents amid the **crowded airport terminals**. The looming deadline was terrifying: officials warned that by the **third day, no airplanes would be allowed to depart** from the state to avoid becoming targets of missile attacks.

Fortunately, we were among the lucky ones; we were able to board the **last plane out**. Only then did we finally find **peace of**

mind, a serenity that lasted until we got back home to our **loved ones**.

The experience was decisive. Until the end of the Gulf War, I had not decided to get back to the Gulf region. Instead, I focused on securing a **permanent livelihood in my homeland**, putting the threat of Saddam and the trauma of the countdown firmly behind me.

The World Watches: Kuwait Becomes a Graveyard

The world watched in stunned astonishment as the war erupted. **Saddam Hussein**, seizing the moment, issued a chilling and definitive threat: any country that dared to defy the invasion of Kuwait **by force** would see the nation **turned into a graveyard**. After just **two days of brutal ground combat**, the fate of the Kuwaiti defenses was sealed. Most of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces were either completely **overrun by the Iraqi Republican Guard** or had desperately escaped to neighboring Saudi Arabia. Crucially, the **Emir and key ministers** were also able to flee the capital, heading south along the main highway to secure refuge in Saudi Arabia, establishing a government-in-exile.

However, the narrative of the two days of fierce battle was complex. While the initial Kuwaiti forces were overrun, other pockets of the **Kuwaiti Armed Forces remained steadfast**, even as the relentless Iraqi Republican Guard pushed through. The final, crushing move came as massive Iraqi ground forces joined the already deployed troops to **take absolute control of the city**. With Kuwait City secured, the Iraqi army then immediately **spearheaded south** to execute deployment tactics along the crucial border with Saudi Arabia, preparing for the next potential stage of the conflict.

The New Regime and Global Condemnation

Following the swift, decisive victory, **Saddam Hussein** immediately moved to dismantle Kuwait's sovereignty. He

declared himself the leader of the **provisional government of "Free Kuwait,"** installing his notoriously brutal cousin, **Ali Hassan Al-Majid,** as the new governor.

Al-Majid was already infamous, known for having employed **chemical weapons** against enemies. This is why he had earned the chilling nickname, "**Chemical Ali,**" among the Iraqi Kurds. At the time of his appointment, he was also the commander-in-chief of Saddam Hussein's feared Intelligence Service.

The invasion was **emphatically condemned by leaders around the world,** a unified rejection of Iraq's blatant act of aggression. The **U.N. Security Council** swiftly followed suit, immediately imposing comprehensive **economic sanctions** on Iraq. The entire international community demanded the **immediate and unconditional pullout** of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait, signaling that this conquest would not be tolerated.

Global Response and Economic Warfare

U.S. President **George H.W. Bush** wasted no time, sternly condemning the invasion as "blatant aggression" and urgently rallying international support. He swiftly formed the **Coalition Forces,** urging allied countries to deploy their militaries to the war zone. This initial coalition included key military forces from the **U.K., Egypt, and Saudi Arabia,** nations which also contributed a staggering total of more or less **\$35 billion** to the effort. Other countries quickly followed suit, joining the unified military front.

Meanwhile, at **10 Downing Street in London,** Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher** echoed the resolve, declaring Saddam Hussein's actions "unconditionally objectionable and offensive." Crucially, however, there was a noticeable silence: **no message of condemnation** had yet been issued by any major Arab country regarding the invasion, highlighting the regional complexities of the crisis.

The geopolitical pressure immediately yielded results. The **Soviet Union,** which had been Iraq's primary supplier of

weapons, deferred the shipment of **all military hardware** to Iraq.

Financial Freeze and Market Plunge

As a direct result of the worldwide condemnation of the barbarous act of aggression, a financial blockade was enacted. All available assets of Kuwait held in the **U.S. and the U.K. were frozen** to prevent any attempt by Iraq to seize or exploit them. Reciprocally, Iraq's own wealth was also held.

The global impact of this fiasco in the Persian Gulf was immediate and devastating: the prices of **oil dramatically soared to their highest level**, while stock markets around the world **plummeted**.

This dramatic invasion had its roots in an earlier economic dispute. Iraq had previously claimed that Kuwait **overproduced oil** from a disputed field on the border and excessively supplied the world market, driving down prices. Iraq had demanded compensation for this act. At that time, while Kuwait appealed for international aid, Western powers had not yet recommended any military action, a hesitation Saddam Hussein clearly misinterpreted as weakness.

Chapter 18

Operation Desert Storm: The Liberation of Kuwait

On January 17, 1991, the Allied Forces officially launched the mission to force Iraqi troops to withdraw from Kuwait, beginning with a massive and sustained aerial bombardment. This air campaign was followed by a decisive ground assault on February 23.

The Coalition Forces swiftly penetrated the besieged capital, which was under firm Iraqi control, and proclaimed a decisive victory in liberating Kuwait. As a result of the invasion and the subsequent counter-attack, numerous establishments, buildings, monuments, and landmarks in the city were left heavily damaged by sporadic gun battles that had lasted for weeks.

Escalation and Containment

During the ground campaign, Iraq attempted to escalate the conflict, unleashing Scud missiles toward Iraqi-occupied territory. However, the Coalition Forces strategically deferred an immediate response, instead declaring a 100-hour ceasefire. Over the following days, intense ground and aerial battles ensued, but these were carefully contained, occurring only in Iraq, Kuwait, and the affected areas on the border of Saudi Arabia. This strategy successfully deterred further Iraqi military action against Israel and into the depths of Saudi Arabia.

The entire conflict, codenamed Operation Desert Storm, was launched by a U.N.-authorized coalition force composed of thirty-four allied nations led by the United States. It was a direct response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the initial aerial phase was one of the longest aerial battles in the history of warfare.

Final Deployment and Outcome

As the tension in the Persian Gulf intensified, the U.S. prepared a massive force to expel Iraq. This force was initially deployed as part of Operation Desert Shield while Iraq continued to ignore the deadlines set by the West. Notably, the Soviet Union expressed its explicit intention not to take part in the military action.

Fierce fighting continued as Iraq launched more Scud missiles against the Coalition Forces, but Iraq's military capability was being severely wounded with every passing day. Eventually, Iraq agreed to a ceasefire.

While the Coalition Forces achieved their goal of liberating Kuwait, Saddam Hussein was not immediately removed from power. In a controversial strategic move, the United States allowed him to remain in power long enough to quell internal Kurdish revolts, creating a complex political aftermath despite the military success of the operation.

Here is a detailed and engaging account of the final push for the liberation of Kuwait:

The Ground Assault and Final Victory

The decisive ground phase to reclaim Kuwait began on February 23, 1991. Divisions of U.S. Marines and Army Infantry drove into Kuwait City, immediately encountering the treacherous defensive layers the Iraqis had constructed: trenches, barbed wire, and extensive minefields. Despite these obstacles, the Iraqi defenses were often poorly manned and quickly overrun in the first succeeding hours.

Numerous tank encounters occurred in the beleaguered city, but overall, the Coalition Forces met with minimal resistance as many Iraqi troops chose to surrender rather than fight. Though

the ground advance was swift, the Coalition did sustain losses. In the air, approximately nine American fighter jets were shot down by the Iraqi air defense systems.

As Arab forces began penetrating the Iraqi-besieged areas, casualties were reported, but they eventually overpowered the Iraqi forces, forcing them to cease fire and surrender. British and American ground forces were deployed to engage the hardened Iraqi Republican Guard, with thousands of Coalition troops and a thousand tanks launching a powerful counterattack that broke the Iraqi formations.

Liberation and the Scorched Earth

Despite desperate reprisals from the retreating Iraqi troops, the Coalition Forces advanced steadily toward Kuwait City. Kuwaiti forces were given the honor of officially liberating the capital, where Iraqi troops were subdued, and only light resistance was encountered. In a moment of national triumph, the Kuwaitis were able to liberate the city with only one casualty and one plane downed.

Following the liberation on February 27, Saddam Hussein officially ordered a retreat, and U.S. President George H.W. Bush formally declared Kuwait liberated. However, one Iraqi unit, unaware of the retreat order, fiercely resisted U.S. Marine troops at the Kuwait International Airport. After a couple of intense hours of fighting, the airport was entirely secured by the American forces.

Triumphantly, within a week of the ground invasion, Iraqi troops were completely expelled from Kuwait. But their final act was one of malicious environmental sabotage: before their final departure, they set fire to almost 700 oil wells and deliberately planted land mines around them to complicate life-saving

efforts for the international firefighting teams sent to quench the flames.

The Fall of Saddam Hussein

The final chapter of Saddam Hussein's rule closed on December 13, 2003, when U.S. forces successfully captured him alive near his hometown of Tikrit. He was discovered hiding in a small, cramped underground shelter, offering no resistance to his captors. At the moment of capture, the once-regal dictator was visually unrecognizable, famously sporting long hair and a large mustache.

The capture of the former leader was greeted with jubilant celebrations across key Iraqi cities. The installed provisional government authorities immediately made plans to put Saddam on trial for his crimes against the Iraqi people. Although sporadic resistance to the coalition forces continued for a time, it gradually subsided following his capture.

Trial and Execution

Politically, the Kurds seized the moment, demanding the right to maintain their semi-autonomous position that had been achieved in the wake of Operation Desert Storm.

Saddam Hussein was eventually tried before the Iraqi Special Tribunal. The central charge was the murder of around 148 Iraqi Shi'ites in Dujail in 1982, an act of vindication following an attempted assassination against him. He was ultimately convicted and found guilty of crimes against humanity, receiving the penalty of death by hanging on November 5, 2006.

On December 30, 2006—the first day of the major Islamic holiday, Eid al-Adha—Saddam Hussein was executed. His body was transported by a U.S. military helicopter to his hometown of

Al-Awja in Tikrit, Iraq, where he was buried near his two sons, Uday and Qusay Hussein.

The final act of justice also came for his notorious cousin: Ali Hassan Al-Majid (Saddam's governor for 'Free Kuwait' and former intelligence chief), was later tried, found guilty of murder, and executed by hanging in 2010.



Author

Artusard Renault is an International pseudonym of Artemio Saguinsin, an author, writer, historian, researcher, lecturer-teacher, academician, and religion & spiritual enthusiast. He has authored and written a number of academic books and religious books that were published by popular self-publishing platforms.