

Hungry Ricky Daddy

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JAMIL JAN KOCHAI

*Hungry Ricky Daddy*

While our apartment hovered on the brink of a four-sided civil war over a miraculous microwave I'd bought at a flea market in Fremont, my little brother's best friend, Ricky Daddy, tried to live off the food given out at student-body meetings on campus. Monday it was the PSA, Tuesday the ASA, Wednesday the PSU, and Thursday the ASU. Every Friday, the brothers got together after jummah for free pizza in the quad. See, Ricky Daddy (whose real name was Abubakr Salem) was saving up to buy an engagement ring for a Palestinian hijabi who'd barely spoken a sentence to him—not for his lack of trying—because the second or the third intifada had left her heart immune to the temptations of Ricky's upper body.

Not that there was anything wrong with our Ricky. He seemed to us quite loveable. With all the looks and charm of your average Pashtun fuck boy, but with the pure-hearted grace of an orphaned virgin. And even though, at first, we didn't believe the fact of his virginity—what with those curls, muscles, dimples—he swore to his celibacy often and without shame. It was more than his looks that made us doubt him. We used to memorize his Instagram DMs as if they were verses from the Quran. One liners. Witty comebacks. Emoji game like Jordan. All of that, and we were supposed to believe the kid still had his V-card at 21?

But my little brother, Mahmood, swore that if Ricky's dick ever got wet, he'd know about it. We'd all know about it because Ricky couldn't lie if you made him say "Wallah." We demanded a demonstration. All ten of us gathered in the kitchen and Mahmood asked Ricky when the last time he was jerked off.

"I don't jerk off," he said, blushing.

"Say Wallah."

He couldn't.

Convinced of his virginity, we still couldn't figure *why* exactly he wouldn't give up that dick. My brother—who'd switched to psychology to up his GPA for med school—explained that before Ricky's grandma died, she used to harp on Ricky nonstop about his dick and balls rotting away in the seventh level of Jahannam saved exclusively for Zina. We

felt content with that explanation and accepted him as he came. Our Ricky Daddy. Virgin fuck boy.

Nonetheless, his looks, his style, and his Instagram fame gave him a bad rep among the Good Girls on campus. That was why we thought Ricky had no chance with Nabeela. Though, to be honest, we didn't know if you could call Nabeela a *Good Girl*. I mean she was on her deen and everything: roamed about campus (first year of her PhD in Islamic Jurisprudence) head to toe in these dark outfits that only revealed her face—handsome but pale and bare—and her hands and her ballerina slippers. Prayed fard, sunnah, nafl, everything. But we were pretty sure the girl was on like six different watch lists. She had an in with the Marxists, the Anarchists, the Islamists, and the Black Nationalists, and we suspected she had contacts inside Hamas. Because the FBI almost certainly had a tail on her, she kept a low profile online. No FB, Twitter, Instagram (where Ricky thrived) or even a Tumblr. Besides her revolutionary habits, there was also a rumor spreading among the Arab sisters that she already had a man waiting for her in Gaza. A cousin of hers. A rebel.

We explained this all to Ricky, but he laughed it off.

"Rebels die young," he joked. "Once he's gone, I'll swoop."

"But why swoop?" we asked. "Why her? She's four years older, three inches taller, and about a hundred IQ points smarter."

"Khadija was older too," he said, "And I'll buy a library card."

Our apartment had its own problems. See, there were three rooms in our place. Me and my brother and Ricky stayed in one room because none of us snored and neither of them bothered me when I made dhi-kr, read Quran, or fasted for the purification of my nafs. Usually, Ricky would be quietly coding or texting (he had the voice of a sleepy big bird and avoided talking when he could) while Mahmood overstudied for exams he would almost certainly pass.

Our three Arab buddies—Abed the Egyptian, Ikram the Syrian, and Yassin the Palestinian—stayed in their own room. As kids, they'd all gone to Annur together. Yassin was a body builder who tried to make up for his fluffy eyebrows with stacks of muscles. He wanted to crush Israel between his bicep and his forearm. Ikram was an Imam's kid. A former Qari addicted to kush. Each puff was another verse forgotten. Abed was like eight different people. He wanted everyone on campus

(hippies, Nazis, Sufis, Salafists, Zionists, soldiers, frat boys) to love him. He did back flips at parties for no reason.

Three Pakhtuns stayed in the third room. Two of them were twins on wrestling scholarships. They wore matching muscle shirts and skinny jeans, and whenever they went out for beers, they would come back in the night and get into fist fights over girls they'd claimed at bars. Zalmay was the third Pashtun. A Kandari from Stockton who kept a shotgun in his closet, filmed the twins' fight every night, and uploaded these videos on YouTube for the ad money. That's how he paid his rent. Twins didn't even know.

Faheem (an Indian kid from Elk Grove) shared the living room with Haydar the Kashmiri. Their rooms were sectioned off with curtains and they paid less rent than everyone else. While Faheem stayed up all night listening to Ahmed Deedat, eating leftover concoctions, and watching *Gilmore Girls*, Haydar worked on his rap album. They both slept in all day except for classes, and Haydar had a talent for ignoring Faheem's Islamic lectures and the whispering that emitted from his curtains whenever he phoned the white girl who was not his girlfriend.

While living with ten other dudes wasn't an ideal situation—had I the means or survival skills, I'd rather have lived in the wilderness like Majnun or Christ—we mostly got along. That was until Faheem brought the rabbit. He didn't tell anyone about it, but the rabbit stayed in his room—where Faheem used to have twenty-minute conversations with it—so nobody cared. But then one day, Haydar woke up with tick bites running up and down his leg. When he asked Faheem if his rabbit had ticks, Faheem told him a thirty-minute story about how the Prophet loved animals. Afterward, Haydar showed him the bites on his leg and Faheem diagnosed them as jinn scars (he, like me, was in the religious studies program).

Haydar, of course, let it go, but when the rest of us heard what happened, we demanded an apartment meeting, which Faheem avoided for two weeks straight by hiding out at his cousin's place until we ambushed him at two in the morning as he was coming back for some frozen dahl. The Twins put him in a headlock for five minutes before he admitted that the rabbit was in his car. Zalmay broke in, stole the cage, grabbed his camera, and drove to Stockton. No one ever saw the rabbit again.

Poor Faheem wept all night.

After that, Faheem began to treat Haydar like shit. Wouldn't say Salam to him, wouldn't lecture him, threw out his food by accident, complained about his raps, woke up early in the morning to watch reruns of Ninja Warrior on full blast when Haydar slept. Haydar took it all without complaint until, inch by inch, Faheem began to move his curtain into Haydar's side of the living room. Within a month, Faheem's room was about a foot wider.

Haydar called an apartment meeting and Faheem demanded evidence. Haydar showed us photos documenting the gradual extension of Faheem's curtains. He showed us the indentations in the carpet from where his dresser was moved ten inches to the right. He showed us the bookshelf at the end of Faheem's bed that would never have fit at the beginning of the semester. He showed us the little holes in the wall where his rod used to hang. Haydar wanted his foot of space back. Faheem denied its existence. They both demanded a vote.

Haydar had my vote, my brother's, and two of the Arabs'. But the Twins took Faheem's side because he was a TA in one of their intro to ethics courses. Zalmay, by default, also went with the Twins, and so did Ikram, who never liked Haydar, because he was a Shia. One of his cousins got killed by Hezbollah fighters in Syria, and Ikram still held a grudge.

So it was five v five. We needed Ricky to break the tie. But Ricky was busy.

Seeing that his looks and his swagger weren't going to do the trick, Ricky had switched up his strategy. Started attending any event he thought Nabeela might show up at. Revolutionary Book Clubs. Anti-Imperialist demonstrations. Post-Colonial Theory courses. The plan was to prove himself during meetings and classes so that Nabeela would see he wasn't a spy. Problem was he didn't know anything except coding. So, to our surprise, Ricky Daddy, who hadn't read a book since *Charlotte's Web*, had started going to the library.

At first, he was mostly there on his laptop, searching Wikipedia pages and five-minute YouTube videos about Palestine, Chechnya, Algeria, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. But mostly he focused on Palestine. He looked at illustrated diagrams and sketch animations of Israeli land grabs and settlement extensions. He watched Israeli street executions, and cell phone clips from the bombings in Gaza. Then he watched many more

execution and bombing clips, sometimes getting distracted by videos from Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan but always, inevitably, returning to Palestine. After consuming as much of the internet info as he could, he moved on to real books.

About a month into our apartment war—with Faheem still gradually eating into Haydar's space—my little brother decided to punish the opposition by moving my microwave from the kitchen into our room. That's when shit really escalated. See, I'd bought my microwave for five bucks at a flea market in Fremont, just hoping it would nuke my leftover Kabuli, but the radiation didn't only heat my food. It somehow made it tastier. Wallah, all you had to do was hit popcorn for any item (except popcorn, which always burned) and wait seven minutes for your faith in Allah's providence to be restored. I could nuke a week-old slice of pizza and the thing would taste better than it had fresh.

Anyway, everyone in the apartment knew the microwave was a Godsend, something like a miracle, and it was the only way any of us would eat anything. So, when Mahmood up and stole it away from them, our opposition lost it. The night the Twins returned from the bar and found the microwave missing, they almost wept. Thought we'd been robbed. When they figured out my brother had stolen the microwave, they threw their bodies against our door until we had to use a dresser as a blockade. Then Zalmay, hearing the commotion and the horrific news, brought out his shotgun and aimed at our door. Not wanting to harm the microwave, the Twins leapt at Zalmay's shotgun just as he fired, pushing it toward the door of the Arabs, who were all passed out inside. The pellets shattered their crystal hookah into a thousand flying shards, which tore into Ikram's back and Abed's side. Zalmay fled with the shotgun. The Arabs attacked the Twins. There was a tussle in the living room and Haydar's curtains were torn, his laptop smashed, and his pleading ignored. Eventually, the Twins got Ikram and Abed into arm bars until they tied them up with Haydar's curtains and dragged them to the student clinic just before the cops arrived and beat the shit out of the Somalian brothers who lived next door. Poor guys got deported.

Me and my brother didn't come out all night and stayed hidden in our room the next day. I missed a midterm and was too scared to meditate. It was only on the second night, when Ricky returned to us

after hearing about the escalation, that we snuck out of the apartment and fled to the fort of books Ricky had created for himself in a secret room up on the sixth floor of the library. Mahmood brought the microwave.

Ricky looked like shit. His curls were a mess. He had eye bags and yellow teeth. He was failing three of his CS classes. And he wouldn't shut the hell up about Palestine. He told us about the Ottomans and the Nakba and the Deir Yassin Massacre. He told us about the PLO and the Six-Day War. He showed us on a map the borders of the apartheid wall, the locations of the military check points, and how the Israelis had separated Gaza and the West Bank like orphaned siblings. He told us about the Brotherhood, the intifada, the birth of Hamas, and the Oslo Accords. He read us recipes for Mansaf, Maqluba, and Musakhan. He told us about the capture of Leila Khaled, the assassinations of Yassin and Rantisi (both killed by hellfire missiles), and the odd journey of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. He went on and on, well into the night, drawing from this book and that, reading us quotes, showing us pictures, bodies, massacres, walls, olive trees. We fell asleep to him reading poems in Arabic.

By the next morning, I'd forgotten everything he tried to teach me. Me and my brother went off to class. Later that night, we returned to Ricky's den for shelter, only to find him researching university appeal's cases on his laptop. See, Nabeela was getting expelled. An article in the *Chronicle* reported she was filmed making anti-Semitic remarks when IDF veterans tried to disrupt a speech the SJP had organized in the quad after an eight-year-old girl was run over by a settler in Nablus. A shouting match turned into a fist fight turned into a brawl. The video was all over the internet. Mostly it was a blurred mess until the very end when someone that might've been Nabeela shouted in Arabic: "May Allah destroy the the Israelis." Her hearing was set for next month.

Ricky immediately dropped his obsession with Palestine and began reading up on the implications of the term *destrory* in Arabic as it functioned in the Quran, in the hadiths, and in the everyday dialect of Palestinians to provide Nabeela with the defense she'd need to stay in school. He stopped changing his clothes or showering. From time to time, he studied for so long he passed out on his books. Me and my brother started looking after him. Fed him Ramen and Gatorade,

gave him decaf tea at night, stole pillows from the Union and propped them all around him, so that when he passed out, he had a soft landing. About a week into the ordeal, me and my brother finally thought to seek out Nabeela. It was only then that we found out the girl had been missing since after the brawl. Back in Palestine, it seemed, to marry that cousin of hers.

When we told Ricky, instead of bawling as we thought he would, he was all questions. Who was the cousin? When was the nikkah? Where would they stay? What would happen to the revolution? We didn't have those answers, but Yassin probably would. We messaged him on FB.

Yassin said he had all the info we wanted but would only provide it in exchange for the microwave. And so, for the sake of Ricky, we gave it up. Yassin went and talked to his sister who talked to her aunt in Jerusalem who found out that Nabeela's cousin's name was Yusuf, that he was with the Islamic Revival, that he was locked up (without charge) in an Israeli prison, and that, in fact, he'd just started a hunger strike about six days before in order to be officially charged with a crime. Nabeela and Yusuf would be married after he was released, but until then, she would wait for her fiancé in the West Bank.

"The West Bank?" Ricky asked.

We showed him the message again, expecting him to wallow, to bleed. Instead, the next day, Ricky announced his own hunger strike.

Though I didn't agree with the political motivations for the fast, I went along with it for the potential spiritual rewards. I thought Ricky might find God in his hunger and, like this, forget Nabeela. I insisted he keep it personal, but he demanded to go public. It began in our apartment, at the start of the winter break, when all our roommates, except Faheem, had gone home. We made a YouTube video announcing Ricky's intention to starve his body until Yusuf Mohammad was charged with a crime. He read a verse from the Quran, condemned the crimes of Israel and the United States, lay down on an old toshak his grandma had made for him, and began to starve.

We posted about the strike all over Facebook: the MSA page, ASA, PSA, ASU, and SJP. Around the third day, the hunger pangs and stomach cramps got really bad for Ricky and we thought he might give up, but when the Palestinian sisters started coming by our apartment, thanking Ricky for his bravery, the pain in his face disappeared into his dimples. About five days in, word started really spreading and students from the



MSA and ASA came to try and convince Ricky to stop, while students from the SJP and ASU came to argue with those who came to convince him to stop. From time to time, distant relatives (we guessed) from the East Coast came to visit him too. They entered his room, muttered for a while, and left dejected. Though none of them could have known about Nabeela, each ama or khala or cousin made a passing remark about the folly of love. We didn't see them again. At one week, a reporter from the *Chronicle* came to do a story. "Radical Islamist starves to free Palestinian Terrorist" was the headline. It was good press. Two days after that someone left a pig carcass in our parking lot.

About two weeks in, Ricky's muscles started melting. The pangs in his belly had stopped altogether and he often felt nauseous and numb. A few days later, a local news channel came by and did an interview. Our original YouTube video was buzzing and the article from the *Chronicle* spread from blog to blog. Supporters and haters gathered in our parking lot. They had protests and demonstrations and fist fights. Eventually, there were maybe thirty students staying in our apartment at all times, looking after Ricky. Even our roommates came home early. Yassin (pre-med) checked on Ricky's pulse, Ikram read him Quran, the Twins carried him from bed to bathroom, Zalmay called up some of his buddies from Stockton, Haydar bought him a \$200 pillow, Abed did back flips, and me and Mahmood were the only ones he'd let wash him. He was getting weaker by the day. Light-headed and slow, he couldn't stand up so easily anymore. When I rubbed his arms or his chest with a washcloth, I thought his skin would tear free.

Around the end of the third week, cops and doctors from the university hospital arrived at our place, demanding that he eat, ready to force feed him with a device the CIA used on Islamists in Guantanamo, but Ricky's followers all came together to lock arms in front of our parking lot and then our apartment, and then the door of our room, shoulder to shoulder, leaving no inch of space for the cops or the doctors to pass through. They tried to toss a few of us out of the way, but when that didn't work, they maced a few students on the frontlines. Luckily though, a video of the incident started making rounds on the internet until it got all the way to CNN.

Then, on the twenty-sixth day of Ricky's hunger strike, Mahmood secretly checked up on Ricky's resurrected Facebook page (30,000+ followers since the strike) where he was updating statuses on Ricky's

health, when he saw that he had a message from an account without a picture that was called “Sister Filastin.” He would’ve immediately ignored it if the message had not started out by calling Ricky his real name. At first, Ricky was upset about the secret Facebook account, but his temper quickly faded when he realized who the message was from. He smiled—first time in a week—and started doing what he did best. For five hours straight, when he should have been reciting Quran or making dhikr or contemplating upon the transient nature of the mortal body, Ricky just texted Nabeela. At the end of the day, Ricky asked Mahmood to delete all his old photos and posts on Instagram, FB, Twitter, and even Myspace.

“After that,” he went on, “bring me a camera and link me up to a live feed.”

“All right, Ricky,” we said, without question.

“And don’t call me Ricky anymore,” he said. “My name is Abubakr Salem.”

Before we set up the live feed, we combed his hair and his beard, which now reached past his Adam’s apple, and we washed his face and moisturized his lips (his vanity still breathing), and got him ready to face the whole world just beneath the open window of our dingy little apartment room. The speech he read was not his own. Nabeela had sent it to him bit by bit on Messenger just hours before.

“Americans,” it began, “my name is Nabeela Mohammad, wife of Yusuf Mohammad, who has been on a hunger strike for five consecutive weeks. On his body is a medical device connected to a surveillance room operating twenty-four hours a day. His heartbeats are slow and may stop at any moment, and doctors, officials, and intelligence officers sit on every side of him, waiting for his end. I chose to speak to you: intellectuals, writers, lawyers, journalists, and civil society activists. I invite you to visit my husband.

“Americans,” it went on, “You may receive instruction to write a romantic story about my husband. You could write, for example, of his melting flesh, of his bared ribcage, and of his stuttering breath. You could write of his eyes that no longer belong to him. And after you write the story, you may publish it and add it to your curricula, and when hundreds of your students read it, they will believe that the Palestinian dies of hunger romantically, fanatically, and without sense,

and you would then rejoice in this funerary ritual and in your cultural and moral superiority.

“My husband was arrested and charged without charge because it is the military that rules our lands—and yours—and the intelligence apparatus that decides, and all the other components of society merely sit from a distance and watch so as to avoid the explosion of our criminal bones. For I have not heard one of you interfere to stop the loud wail of death and the quiet torture of our dark bodies. It is as if every one of you has turned into gravediggers, and everyone wears his military suit: the judge, the writer, the journalist, the merchant, the academic, and the poet, and I cannot believe that a whole society was turned into guards over our deaths and our lives. Nonetheless, you may be sure, all of you hearing this, that we will die satisfied and having satisfied. We do not accept being deported from our lands. We do not accept your courts and your rules. If you have passed over our country and destroyed it in the name of a God or a principle, you will not pass over our elegant souls, which have declared disobedience. For the defeated will not remain defeated, and the victor will not remain a victor. History isn’t only ever measured by battles and massacres and prisons, but also by the incremental blood drip of the thinnest veins. *A’udhu billahi min ash Shaytanir Rajim. Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim.*” \*

Then we cut the feed and posted everywhere and waited.

The video barely made a blip. The outrage over the police harassment had subsided after a boat of frat boys went missing somewhere along the Florida coast. The next day, because our food tasted like dirt in the wake of Ricky’s starvation, me and Mahmood joined the strike. The day after, it was Yassin and Ikram. Then Abed and the Pakhtuns. Then Haydar. And by the thirty-second day of his hunger strike, when Abubakr Salem began to lose his memory, we had over a hundred Muslims (most of them Palestinian) starving with us.

We started buzzing again online and on tv. Trump and Netanyahu and a few American Muslim leaders denounced us as terrorist sympathizers. Very soon afterward, Abubakr Salem’s movement became statewide. We had Muslims and Arab students from all the UCs and CSUs joining the strike. By the forty-first day, when he couldn’t stop vomiting bile or shitting soft splatters of blood, our movement had become national. West Coast, East Coast, until, around six weeks in, we had organizations in the UK and France striking with us too. Then a Syrian artist in Belgium took

a still of his face from the video of Nabeela's speech, sepia-toned it with an app, and put the image on a poster. The next day, people were wearing T-shirts and sweaters with Abubakr Salem's starving face plastered across it. He still looked pretty then. By the fifty-second day, while his body kept shrinking and bloody sores grew out of his back and swelled and burst into open mouths, his beard and his curls had grown long and wild. He'd lost his hearing and seemed to go blind from time to time. At this point, we had a few Muslim doctors working around the clock and our apartment room had been turned into a makeshift clinic. We got so desperate to keep him alive, we began to microwave (and then reice) the five cups of water he drank after each of the daily prayers, hoping the miracle of the microwave might keep his heart beating. But it seemed more and more likely he would die. Nonetheless, through the near loss of all his senses, through the vomiting and shitting and lapses in consciousness, he kept on texting Nabeela about God knows what because he would not let us see and would not let us type, though his fingers seemed to be on the brink of breaking.

On the sixtieth day, when his internal organs began to fail, we had about five thousand followers starving for the sake of Abubakr Salem or Yusuf or Nabeela or Al Aqsa or Palestine or fame or guilt or for some secret thing in their hearts no one could ever know, not even they themselves. To be honest, by then, I was so hungry I couldn't even tell you why exactly I was starving. I told myself that political purification was still purification. But my body did not feel pure in its melting. I asked Allah many times to still the animal inside me. He did not listen.

On the sixty-first day, Faheem, who before then could not bring himself to give up his raisin soups, finally joined the strike. About five minutes after that so did the white girl who was not his girlfriend. A few hours later, CNN came to interview her. By that night, she was a worldwide sensation. The next morning, Trump flew to Jerusalem and personally requested that Netanyahu officially charge Yusuf Mohammad. So, after sixty-eight days on strike, Yusuf Mohammad was formally charged with inciting violence because his demonstration had caused several protests in Gaza. He was moved to a different facility, and with his left wrist still handcuffed to a hospital bed, Yusuf Mohammad, spokesman for The Islamic Revival, graduate student, poet, orphan, and husband, ended his fast with a date and a glass of milk, before promptly dying of heart failure. Almost exactly ten hours later, Abubakr Salem,

formerly known as Ricky Daddy, ate a microwaved date, drank a cold glass of milk, typed a message to Nabeela, and stopped starving.

Because he had no real family, me and my roommates were the ones who washed him for the janaza. Me and Mahmood did the istinja, while the rest of the guys helped with wudhu. Only Faheem could not bring himself to touch Ricky's body, and so, instead, kept filling our plastic water jug with hundreds of flower petals. Three times we washed his body with lotus water and camphor, and then we trimmed his beard and cut his hair and brushed his teeth and cleaned his sores until his stench of death was smothered by tree bark and flower petals.

Before the strike, Ricky once told us a story about Sheikh Abdullah Azzam who was killed in a car bomb in Peshawar but whose body—it was said—was left without any mark or wound or blemish. And it wasn't that I expected Ricky's sores and bruises to disappear with his dying, but after he died, and we wrapped his body in a kafan, I wanted so badly for his corpse to be perfect again that I could not bring myself to say the dua for the dead during his burial. In the end, he was so light I swear to Allah I could have carried him the fifteen miles from the mosque to the grave by myself. I would have done it too, had my roommates let me.

Two days after Ricky died, I messaged Nabeela's secret Facebook account, and for whatever reason—maybe she thought Ricky's account had been hacked, maybe she just didn't want to hear from me—she never replied. Seven months later, Nabeela gave birth to a daughter in Bethlehem. The story went that just before the hunger strike started, she was able to smuggle Yusuf's sperm out of the prison in a disinfected candy wrapper. She never went on to marry. Instead, she took up her husband's former position as spokesman for The Islamic Revival, and due to the public nature of his death, and her daughter's birth, and her speeches, which became more striking with her accumulated years of suffering, and her habit of always wearing the full niqab so that almost no one on earth knew what she looked like, Nabeela became a sort of legend. She organized the most devastating series of bombings in Jerusalem's history. Her speeches and writings were collected into an award-winning book of essays. After assisting in The Islamic Revival's takeover of the West Bank, which, some say, was orchestrated through the compliance of the IDF, she began her own splinter organization.

Her followers worshipped her and swore by her immortality, though there were reports she'd been assassinated by Mossad and that it was actually her daughter who had taken up her niqab and her position as the secret face of the Palestinian Islamist Resistance.

We never believed the rumors of her dying. In fact, over the years of her increasing fame, at one point or another, each of us from Ricky's apartment tried to contact Nabeela (letters, messages, videos) in order to declare our love and offer our lives. We swore to be gentle husbands and respectable fathers and none of us ever married anyone else (except for Faheem). Instead, I graduated from Berkeley, sought solitude at Zaytuna, lost faith in the white Sufis, went to Turkey, got caught up in the civil war, came back to the States, was arrested for funding terrorism, tried to travel to Palestine, was denied entry, and eventually ended up in Afghanistan, where I lost faith in God, then art, then capitalism, then atheism, then Buddhism, and then my memories, which, finally, led me back to God again.

In that time, I sent Nabeela very many messages and letters and asked her very many stupid questions because I never thought she would read them. I asked, for example, if she loved Yusuf and if Yusuf loved her, and if she loved him, what was it she loved? I asked her who he was and what he read. I asked her if her daughter was the second coming of Christ. I asked her if she defended the fact of her virginity from childbirth. I asked her if she ever watched the video of Ricky giving her speech. I asked her if she noticed how he'd combed his hair and brushed his beard. I asked her what she thought of the way he spoke her words. I asked her if she might let Ricky take her out on a date in Jannah after we all died. I asked her where she might be when she read this message. I asked her what Palestine looked like. I told her I imagined many rolling hills and olive trees and roads built of white stone.

"I thought he looked very beautiful," Nabeela replied one morning, some years after Ricky died, and then asked me who had moistened his lips.

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\*Portions of Nabeela's speech should be attributed to the "Hunger Speech" of Samer Issawi