Michael Crichton passages

Christ, it was cold, George Morton thought, climbing out of the Land Cruiser. The millionaire philanthropist stamped his feet and pulled on gloves, trying to warm himself. It was three o’clock in the morning, and the sky glowed red, with streaks of yellow from the still-visible sun. A bitter wind blew across the Sprengisandur; the rugged, dark plain in the interior of Iceland. Flat gray clouds hung low over the lava that stretched away for miles. The Icelanders loved this place. Morton couldn’t see why.

In any case, they had reached their destination: directly ahead lay a huge, crumpled wall of dirt-covered snow and rock, stretching up to the mountains behind. This was Snorrajokul, one tongue of the huge Vatnajokull glacier, the largest ice cap in Europe.

The driver, a graduate student, climbed out and clapped his hands with delight. “Not bad at all! Quite warm! You are lucky, it’s a pleasant August night.” He was wearing a T-shirt, hiking shorts, and a light vest. Morton was wearing a down vest, a quilted windbreaker, and heavy pants. And he was still cold.

He looked back as the others got out of the backseat. Nicholas Drake, thin and frowning, wearing a shirt and a tie and a tweed sport coat beneath his windbreaker, winced as the cold air hit him. With his thinning hair, wire-frame glasses, and pinched, disapproving manner, Drake conveyed a scholarly quality that in fact he cultivated. He did not want to be taken for what he was, a highly successful litigator who had retired to become the director of the National Environmental Resource Fund, a major American activist group. He had held the job at NERF for the last ten years.

Next, young Peter Evans bounced out of the car. Evans was the youngest of Morton’s attorneys, and the one he liked best. Evans was twenty-eight and a junior associate of the Los Angeles firm of Hassle and Black. Now, even late at night, he remained cheerful and enthusiastic. He pulled on a Patagonia fleece and stuck his hands in his pockets, but otherwise gave no sign that the weather bothered him.

Morton had flown all of them in from Los Angeles on his Gulfstream G5 jet, arriving in Keflavik airport at nine yesterday morning. None of them had slept, but nobody was tired. Not even Morton, and he was sixty-five years old. He didn’t feel the slightest sense of fatigue.

Just cold.

Khaled Hosseini

It has always been my hope that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* would become a relic of the past. Through the story of Mariam and Laila, the novel chronicles the struggles and hopes of Afghan women over decades of violence and political turmoil. The 1990’s, in particular, were punishing years for Afghan women. In the civil war of 1992-1996—a brutal conflict that saw swaths of Kabul demolished and claimed some 50,000 lives—women bore the brunt of suffering. Women were targeted and used as spoils of war. They were abducted, sexually assaulted, forced into marriage with Mujahideen militiamen, and sold into prostitution rings. The brutality ended in 1996, when the Taliban drove out the fractured Mujahideen. But peace and stability came at a crushing cost—especially to women.

What happened next is well documented. The Taliban stripped women of most essential rights. Draconian laws prohibited women from traveling without a male companion. Women were shut out of schools, government positions, and most sectors of the labor market. Wearing jewelry, laughing in public, painting fingernails, singing, or watching unapproved films became crimes punishable by flogging or worse. Literacy rates plummeted. Suicide and mental illness among girls and women skyrocketed. The burqa became a symbol of the relentless oppression of Afghan women.

When *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 2007, a few years after the American intervention, it seemed possible to me—maybe even plausible—that my book would in fact become a relic of the past, a tale from a dark era overcome and hopefully left behind. Though in rural Afghanistan conditions often remained onerous for women, millions of girls returned to school. Women enrolled in universities and ran for political office. They served as mayors, provincial governors, police chiefs, lawyers, IT engineers, members of parliament. Women spoke on television nightly. They worked alongside aid workers in NGO’s. Patriarchal cultural norms continued to present challenges to female autonomy, but Afghan women, as the saying goes, “nevertheless persisted.”

I won’t ever forget the horrific scenes at the Kabul airport in August 2021. Nor how it felt like American military planes had scarcely left Afghan airspace before the Taliban claimed Kabul. The Taliban’s second reign has been an unmitigated disaster. The economy is on the verge of collapse. Nearly 24 million need vital humanitarian relief. Millions don’t know where their next meal will come from. Millions more are displaced. Draconian laws are back. And, as in the 1990’s, it has fallen once again on Afghan women to bear the brunt. Once more they have lost their freedom of movement. Once again, they are barred from high school and university. Once more their medical care is comprised, their work opportunities curtailed, their dignity taken.

I am convinced that there is no group of people more resilient or resourceful on the planet than Afghan women. They are an enormous asset to Afghanistan, and for the country to have any chance at a viable future, women must be allowed to fully practice their rights. They must be given access to economic, civic, and legal space to make good on their incalculable contributions.

Jeffrey Archer

An outrider from the Special Escort Group swept into Scotland Yard, closely followed by a green Jaguar and an unmarked Land Rover, while two police motorcycles brought up the rear, completing the royal convoy. They all came to a halt as Big Ben chimed eleven thirty.

A close protection officer leapt out of the front seat of the Jaguar and opened the back door. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Peter Imbert, stepped forward and bowed. ‘Welcome to Scotland Yard, Your Royal Highness,’ he said, and was greeted with that warm, shy smile with which the public had become so familiar.

‘Thank you, Sir Peter,’ she replied as they shook hands. ‘It was kind of you to agree to my unusual request.’

‘My pleasure, ma’am,’ said Sir Peter, before turning to the welcoming party of senior officers who were waiting in line.

‘May I present the Deputy Commissioner . . .’

The Princess shook hands with each of the officers in turn until she reached the end of the line, when she was introduced to the head of the Met’s murder investigation teams.

‘Commander Hawksby is known as “Murder One”,’ the Commissioner told her. ‘And Chief Inspector William Warwick will act as your guide this morning,’ he added as a little girl stepped forward, curtsied and offered the Princess a small bouquet of pink roses. She received the broadest smile of all.

The Princess bent down and said, ‘Thank you, and what is your name?’

‘Artemisia,’ the bowed head whispered to the ground.

‘What a pretty name,’ said the Princess.

She was about to move on when Artemisia looked up and said, ‘Why aren’t you wearing a crown?’

William turned bright red, while his number two, Inspector Ross Hogan, stifled a laugh, causing Artemisia to burst into tears. The Princess leant down again, took the little girl in her arms and said, ‘Because I’m not a Queen, Artemisia, just a Princess.’

‘But you will be the Queen one day.’

‘Then I’ll wear a crown.’

This seemed to satisfy Artemisia, who smiled as her father led the Met’s royal guest into the building.

The door was held open by a young cadet, who the Princess stopped to have a word with, before William guided her towards a waiting lift. A long discussion had taken place prior to the Princess’s visit, as to whether she should walk up the stairs to the first floor or take the lift. The lift had won by five votes to four. An equally fraught decision was who shouldaccompany her in the lift. The Commissioner, Commander Hawksby and William made the shortlist, while the Princess’s lady-in-waiting would take the second lift, along with Inspector Ross Hogan and Detective Sergeant Roycroft.

William had his script well prepared, but was immediately thrown off course by HRH’s first question.

‘Is Artemisia your daughter, by any chance?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said William, remembering that the Hawk had told him that ‘ma’am’ had to rhyme with ‘spam’, not ‘harm’.

‘But what evidence do you have?’ he asked, forgetting for a moment that he wasn’t addressing one of his junior officers.

‘If she hadn’t been your daughter, you wouldn’t have blushed,’ came back the reply as they stepped into the lift.

‘I did tell her not to speak to you,’ said William, ‘and certainly not to ask you any questions.’

‘The fact she disobeyed you probably means she’ll be the most interesting person I’ll meet today,’ whispered Diana as the lift doors closed. ‘Why did you call her Artemisia?’

‘She’s named after Artemisia Gentileschi, the great Italian Baroque painter.’

‘So, you must have a love of art?’

‘A passion, ma’am. But it was my wife Beth, who’s keeper of pictures at the Fitzmolean, who chose the name.’

‘Then I’ll have another chance to meet your daughter,’ said the Princess, ‘because if I remember correctly, I’m opening the Fitzmolean’s Frans Hals exhibition next year.

I’d better make sure I’m wearing at least a coronet if I’m not to be told off again,’ she added as the lift doors opened on the first floor.

‘The Crime Museum, ma’am,’ began William, returning to his script, ‘more commonly known as the Black Museum, was the brainchild of an Inspector Neame, who in 1869 felt it would assist his colleagues to solve and even prevent crimes if they could study well-known cases. He was assisted by a Constable Randall, who gathered together material from various notorious criminals and crime scenes, which made up the first exhibits in this rogues’ gallery. The museum opened five years later, in April 1874, but it still remains closed to the public.’

William glanced back to see Ross Hogan, chatting to the Princess’s lady-in-waiting. He led his guest down a long corridor towards room 101, where another door was being held open for the royal visitor. William found himself wondering if the Princess ever opened a door for herself, but quickly dismissed the thought and returned to his script.

‘I hope you won’t find the museum too disturbing, ma’am. The occasional visitor has been known to faint,’ he said. They entered a room whose dim lighting only added to the macabre atmosphere.

‘It can’t be worse than four days at Ascot,’ replied the Princess, ‘when I regularly want to faint.’

William wanted to laugh, but managed to prevent himself.

‘The first exhibit,’ he said as they approached a large glass cabinet, ‘includes the early pieces of memorabilia collected by Neame and Randall.’

The Princess looked closely at a collection of weapons used by seventeenth-century criminals to murder their victims, including a walking stick that, with a twist of its knob, became a sword, along with various flick knives, heavy wooden cudgels and knuckle-dusters. William quickly moved on to the next cabinet, which was dedicated to Jack the Ripper, and included a handwritten letter he’d sent to the London Central News Agency in 1888 at the height of his serial killings, taunting the police by predicting they would never catch him. But then, as William reminded his guest, that was before the Met had begun to use fingerprinting to identify criminals, and more than a century before the discovery of DNA.

‘I haven’t fainted yet,’ said the Princess as they moved on to the next cabinet, which contained a pair of antique binoculars. ‘What’s so special about them?’ she asked.

‘They weren’t designed for Ascot, ma’am,’ said William.

‘They were a gift from a particularly unpleasant individual to his fiancée a few days after she had jilted him. When she held them up to her eyes and adjusted the focus, two nails shot out and blinded her. At his trial the accused was asked by prosecuting counsel why he’d done such an evil thing, and he simply replied, “I didn’t want her to look at another man ever again.”’

Diana covered her eyes and William quickly moved on. ‘This next exhibit, ma’am, is particularly fascinating,’ said William, pointing to a small, plain metal box. ‘It provided the vital clue in the first case solved by the Met using fingerprints as evidence. In 1905 the brothers Alfred and Albert Stratton were arrested for the murder of a shop owner, Thomas Farrow, and his wife, Ann. They would have got away with it if Alfred hadn’t left a single thumb print on the empty cash box. They were both found guilty and hanged.’

They moved on to the next cabinet, where the Princess glanced briefly at a photograph before turning to William and saying, ‘Tell me about him.’

‘On the eighteenth of February, 1949, John Haigh killed Olive Durand-Deacon, a wealthy widow, while she was visiting his engineering workshop in Crawley. After Haigh had removed everything of value she had with her, he dissolved her body in a drum of sulphuric acid, believing that if the police were unable to produce a body, he couldn’t be charged with murder. However, he didn’t take into account the expertise of a certain Dr Keith Simpson, a pathologist who discovered three gallstones and a couple of the victim’s false teeth in a pile of rubble at the back of the workshop. Haigh was arrested, convicted and hanged.’

Sydney Sheldon

A stocky, stony-faced matron with sable-brown dyed hair was addressing the new arrivals: "Some of you are gonna be here for a long, long time. There's only one way you're gonna make it, and that's by forgettin' all about the outside world. You can do your time the easy way or the hard way. We have rules here, and you'll follow those rules. We'll tell you when to get up, when to work, when to eat, and when to go to the toilet. You break any of our rules, and you'll wish you was dead. We like to keep things peaceful here, and we know how to handle troublemakers." Her eyes flicked over to Tracy. "You'll be taken for your physical examinations now. After that you'll go to the showers and be assigned your cells. In the mornin' you'll receive your work duties. That's all." She started to turn away.

A pale young girl standing next to Tracy said, "Excuse me, please, could  - "

The matron whirled around, her face filled with fury. "Shut your fuckin' mouth. You speak only when you're spoken to, do you understand? That goes for all you assholes."

The tone, as much as the words, was a shock to Tracy. The matron signaled to two women guards at the back of the room. "Get these no-good bitches out of here."

Tracy found herself being herded out of the room with the others, down a long corridor. The prisoners were marched into a large, white-tiled room, where a fat, middle-aged man in a soiled smock stood next to an examination table.

One of the matrons called out, "Line up," and formed the women into one long line.

The man in the smock said, "I'm Dr. Glasco, ladies. Strip!"

The women turned to look at one another, uncertainly. One of them said, "How far should we  - ?"

"Don't you know what the hell strip means? Get your clothes off  -  all of them."

Slowly, the women began to undress. Some of them were self-conscious, some outraged, some indifferent. On Tracy's left was a woman in her late forties, shivering violently, and on Tracy's right was a pathetically thin girl who looked to be no more than seventeen years old. Her skin was covered with acne.

The doctor gestured to the first woman in line. "Lie down on the table and put your feet in the stirrups."

The woman hesitated.

"Come on. You're holding up the line."

She did as she was told. The doctor inserted a speculum into her vagina. As he probed, he asked, "Do you have a venereal disease?"

"No."

"We'll soon find out about that."

The next woman replaced her on the table. As the doctor started to insert the same speculum into her, Tracy cried out, "Wait a minute!"

The doctor stopped and looked up in surprise. "What?"

Everyone was staring at Tracy. She said, "I... you didn't sterilize that instrument."

Dr. Glasco gave Tracy a slow, cold smile. "Well! We have a gynecologist in the house. You're worried about germs, are you? Move down to the end of the line."

"What?"

"Don't you understand English? Move down."

Tracy, not understanding why, took her place at the end of the line.

"Now, if you don't mind," the doctor said, "we'll continue." He inserted the speculum into the woman on the table, and Tracy suddenly realized why she was the last in line. He was going to examine all of them with the same unsterilized speculum, and she would be the last one on whom he used it. She could feel an anger boiling up inside her. He could have examined them separately, instead of deliberately stripping away their dignity. And they were letting him get away with it. If they all protested  -  It was her turn.

"On the table, Ms. Doctor."

Tracy hesitated, but she had no choice. She climbed up on the table and closed her eyes. She could feel him spread her legs apart, and then the cold speculum was inside her, probing and pushing and hurting. Deliberately hurting. She gritted her teeth.

"You got syphilis or gonorrhea?" the doctor asked.

"No." She was not going to tell him about the baby. Not this monster. She would discuss that with the warden.

She felt the speculum being roughly pulled out of her. Dr. Glasco was putting on a pair of rubber gloves. "All right," he said. "Line up and bend over. We're going to check your pretty little asses."

Before she could stop herself, Tracy said, "Why are you doing this?"

Dr. Glasco stared at her. "I'll tell you why, Doctor. Because assholes are great hiding places. I have a whole collection of marijuana and cocaine that I got from ladies like you. Now bend over." And he went down the line, plunging his fingers into anus after anus. Tracy was sickened. She could feel the hot bile rise in her throat and she began to gag.

"You vomit in here, and I'll rub your face in it." He turned to the guards. "Get them to the showers. They stink."

Carrying their clothes, the naked prisoners were marched down another corridor to a large concrete room with a dozen open shower stalls.

"Lay your clothes in the corner," a matron ordered. "And get into the showers. Use the disinfectant soap. Wash every part of your body from head to foot, and shampoo your hair."

Tracy stepped from the rough cement floor into the shower. The spray of water was cold. She scrubbed herself hard, thinking, I'll never be clean again. What kind of people are these? How can they treat other human beings this way? I can't stand fifteen years of this.

A guard called out to her, "Hey, you! Time's up. Get out."

Tracy stepped out of the shower; and another prisoner took her place. Tracy was handed a thin, worn towel and half dried her body.

When the last of the prisoners had showered, they were marched to a large supply room where there were shelves of clothes guarded by a Latino inmate who sized up each prisoner and handed out gray uniforms. Tracy and the others were issued two uniform dresses, two pairs of panties, two brassieres, two pairs of shoes, two nightgowns, a sanitary belt, a hairbrush, and a laundry bag. The matrons stood watching while the prisoners dressed. When they had finished, they were herded to a room where a trusty operated a large portrait camera set on a tripod.

"Stand over there against the wall."

Tracy moved over to the wall.

"Full face."

She stared into the camera. Click.

"Turn your head to the right."

She obeyed. Click.

"Left." Click. "Over to the table."

The table had fingerprint equipment on it. Tracy's fingers were rolled across an inky pad, then pressed onto a white card.